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SCIENCE STORIES

THIS MAGAZINE CONTAINS NEW STORIES ONLY

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Following are the winners of MARVEL'S contest for the best letters on the subject:

"Which story did you like best in the first issue of MARVEL, and why—and what would be your editorial policy for MARVEL if you were its publisher?"

The editor of MARVEL wants to assure the hundreds of readers who wrote in that it was no easy task selecting the best letters, and to heartily thank all who were kind enough to offer their suggestions for the future editorial policy of MARVEL.

Some readers thought MARVEL should lean more heavily toward science, some thought it should emphasize human interest. But the prize-winning letters, and most of the others as well, demanded that MARVEL continue to maintain its first issue variety: some stories heavy on science, some heavy on human interest, some embodying science and human interest equally. And the first issue policy of two book-length novels and a few shorts was endorsed by MARVEL readers practically 100%.

Thank you, MARVEL readers, and may you feel repaid for your generous co-operation by seeing MARVEL become the science magazine you personally want!

x x x x x

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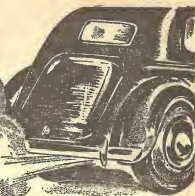
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Many Radio Experts Make \$30, \$50, \$75 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays many \$20 to \$50 a year—full time jobs with Radio fobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts operate full or part time Radio sales and service businesses. Radio manufacturers and fobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$6,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay, see the world besides. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loud speaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I have trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read their letters. Mail coupon.

There's a Real Future in Radio for Well Trained Men

Radio already gives jobs to more than 350,000 people. In 1937 Radio enjoyed one of its most prosperous years. Nearly \$500,000,000 worth of sets, tubes and parts were sold. Over 5,000,000 home radios were sold—25,000,000 hours (5 out of 5 in the U. S.) now have one or more sets. Over 1,800,000 auto Radios were sold—5,000,000 cars now have radios. Every year millions of sets go out of date, are replaced with newer models. Every year millions of dollars are spent on transmitting equipment, television development, etc. The \$30, \$50, \$75 a week jobs have grown from a few hundred 20 years ago to thousands today. And Radio is still a young industry—developing fast.

Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

Almost every neighborhood needs a good spare time serviceman. The day

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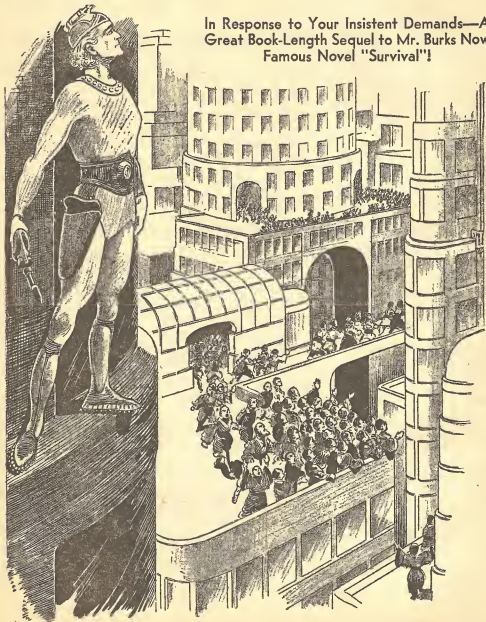
by ARTHUR J. BURKS

DAVID HASLUP, chief Elder of the United States of Sanctuary, lifted his eyes from the effects left behind by his brother Frank, who had died recently, his ashes going into the dishonored Black Colum-

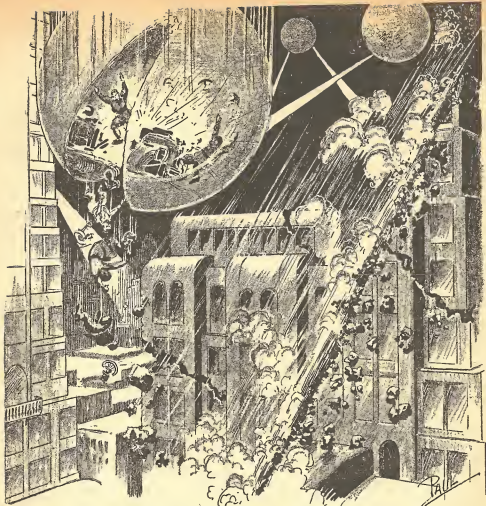
barium, reserved for the dust of those who had given mortal offense to the inhabitants of Sanctuary.

Frank Haslup, a year younger than David—who was ninety odd, and looked twenty-five—had laughed at old beliefs,

In Response to Your Insistent Demands—A Great Book-Length Sequel to Mr. Burks' Now Famous Novel "Survival"!



The first David Haslup had led the remnants of his war-weary people into the ground, . . . How, after thirty-nine generations in their cavern universe, would those Sanctuarians extinction at the hands of



The two sections of the building slid apart

and had been the first to venture forth from Sanctuary, which had been the cavern home of the inhabitants of the United States for thirty-nine generations. According to the old stories, Sanctuarians had once been a vast people, living in a still vaster cavern. They had been attacked by Mongols—whatever they were—and harried almost to extinction. The first David Haslup had led the remnants of his people into the ground, where they had begun a desperate fight for survival, wresting all their necessities from the earth itself.

With the passage of centuries Sanctuarians came to believe that this story was simply legend, that Sanctuarians had existed in the United States of Sanctuary from time immemorial; that there couldn't possibly be a vaster cavern anywhere, with a dome so far away

that light itself required billions of years to travel from one suspended sun to another. Frank Haslup had gone out of Sanctuary, with a small group of followers, and had come back with amazing tales. He had seen people with yellow faces. He had seen buildings, or columns, reaching up into space, and supporting nothing at all—while everybody in Sanctuary knew that buildings had to support something. Frank claimed to have seen a body of water in the west that stretched for thousands of miles to the west, into nothingness. Obviously this could not be true. Sanctuarian Elders knew it couldn't be true, for in thirty-nine generations of enlarging the cavern of their abode, they had encountered other caverns, some of them occupied by people like themselves—with whom they had amalgamated—some of them bare.

where they had begun a desperate fight to wrest all their necessities from the earth itself
fare against their ancient enemies, if they ventured forth at last to avenge their virtual
the Mongol imperialists?

But always when they reached the limits of a given cavern, they had found more solid earth. They had never gone upward beyond the original roof of their cavern, nor eastward from the place where—legend said—the first Haslup with his desperate band of men, women and children, had entered Sanctuary, then a tiny cavern scarcely large enough for that first group to live in. Elders long ago had decreed that no excavating eastward or upward must ever take place—and Sanctuary had honored the ancient taboo.

All except Frank Haslup, who had created tiny instruments by whose aid he had literally moved through the earth. He had been gone for days and weeks. Then he had returned with an amazing tale of his experiences, and the report that strangely colored men had slain all of his band but himself.

From that day on Frank Haslup had been doomed, at his death, to the Black Columbarium, where niches did not even indicate the names of the dead, where no pictures of them hung, and where they were forgotten as quickly as possible. David Haslup, as ruler of Sanctuary, sorrowed for the disgrace and death of his brother.

For in his effects he found what might well be proof of what Frank Haslup had returned to report. David checked Frank's reports, the diary he had brought back with him, against the oldest Sanctuarian records extant—in which strange places were named: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Chicago, New York City, and countless others. Those words had meant almost nothing to Sanctuarians for thirty generations. Now, Frank described such places in his writings and—allowing for the changes that time and the yellow invaders had surely brought about—David was beginning to believe that Frank *had* seen the things he had reported.

But why hadn't he given his reports to the Elders? Why had he kept silent during the last five years of his life? Silence in the face of coventry, the headshaking of his people?

"Maybe," muttered David to himself, "he didn't want us to go out, as he did, and perhaps lose our lives in a hopeless fight with the yellow-skinned ones! Maybe, in the end, he did not want us to believe, preferring to rest his ashes

in the Black Columbarium."

DAVID leaned back, a vague terror growing in him. The urge was in his soul to call all the Elders together, tell them he believed that Frank had actually brought back the truth—that the time had come, perhaps, for Sanctuarians to go forth from Sanctuary, to take back from the "Mongols" the land the "Mongols" had taken from their first known ancestors. There had been a legend since the beginning, that this must come to pass. But with the succeeding generations who had known nothing but Sanctuary, the flame had burned down, and belief had been in them for centuries that the vast cavern of Sanctuary, five miles deep, hundreds of miles square—holding millions of Sanctuarians—was all that existed where men might live.

If, now, David were to espouse the cause of his dead brother, he himself might leave his ashes in the Black Columbarium, and be forgotten to the end of time by his people.

"But if Frank was right," he told himself, "and we can go forth and vanquish the inhabitants of the vast cavern he said he found, what a boon it would be for us. We could again allow the birth-rate to rise, unchecked. No longer need we give a couple permission to have a child only when someone died. We could multiply for ages, and have all the room we could need."

He pondered the matter for hours, carefully avoiding the use of his Televisi-ring, so that his thoughts might not go out to all Sanctuary, and they know what heresy he had in mind. The fate of Sanctuary perhaps, of the Haslups surely, rested in his hands. There had not been a time when a Haslup had not ruled Sanctuary. They were believed to be descended from gods. . . .

David Haslup came to a decision—and for the first time in ages he planned to have all the other Elders, personally and materially, before him in his Meditation Room. There were twenty-five of them, each ruling a twenty-fifth part of Sanctuary, each with his dwelling in almost the center of his own political division of the country. In the beginning there had been fifty Elders, but the lines of twenty-five of them had ended in one way or another.

David turned the seal of his Televisoring into his palm, and thought the names of the other Elders, George Blake, Jan Schmidt, all of them—but with Blake and Schmidt the two most important next to himself.

"Come in person," he thought, "to my Meditation Room. I have reached a decision of great importance."

One by one, as he checked off the Elders, they appeared astrally in his room, promising to arrive in person without delay. The faces of all of them were grave. Not in generations had they been thus called before the Chief Elder.

They came. They crowded into the Meditation Room, rather self-consciously, because they were not accustomed to such close association with one another. David bade them seat themselves. He looked from one face to the other. He wetted his lips with a dry tongue. Jan Schmidt stared at him, and spoke first.

"I'll save you the trouble of mentioning a forbidden name, David," he said. "It's about Frank, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"We are Elders," said Jan Schmidt, "and have the authority to break our own rules if we deem it necessary. You think it is necessary, else you would not so have violated tradition as to bring us here like this. Out with it, then!"

The Elders were dressed in tightly fitting garments that were almost like their own skin. Some of them were well over a hundred years of age, but Sanctuary had extended man's life-span by seventy years and more, so all looked young—around thirty, perhaps. They were the perfect rulers of a perfect state, where none had to labor, because machinery had taken over all their work, where, in their architecture, music was almost made visible.

Their subjects were perfect subjects, too, because all their lives were devoted to perfection and—according to the dishonored Frank Haslup—boredom, because they had nothing left for which to strive.

THEIR blazing artificial suns, lighting all the vast cavern. Their breathless heights which meant nothing to Sancturians, because they knew the secret of anti-gravity, and rose or fell in space with the ease of birds—though to

none of them was "bird" a word with any meaning—if they wore their anti-gravitational shoes and almost invisible skull-caps.

"Yes," said David Haslup, "I would speak of my brother. I have poured over his records. 'He,' David took the plunge, 'was condemned unjustly to coventry and the Black Columbarium. I am convinced that my brother returned to us with the truth on his lips, as he saw it. . . .'"

"Take care, David!" said George Blake. "It would be an evil day for Sanctuary if her hereditary ruler were also to be condemned to the Black Columbarium when he died! We all know the absurdities that Frank Haslup brought back. Buildings that moved on the water. Smaller buildings that moved through space. Buildings rising to vast heights, yet supporting no roofs, as here. Shining bodies that hung in space, so far away that billions of years were required for their light to reach the limits of the cavern he found. . . . No, David, he was deluded!"

"I do not believe it! Jan Schmidt, your family has always been the strongest believer in the old legends. What do you think in your secret heart?"

"That there may once have been a place where our forefathers lived, outside of Sanctuary, but never that it was as vast as Frank Haslup reported. I agreed with the general decision that Frank be dishonored."

"But you recall the legend of the 'invaders' from across the great water. . . .?"

"Pacific Ocean," said George Blake. "Obviously a name to be taken allegorically. A watery realm which could not be believed in, yet that sounded impossible only because we, being mortal, were not meant to understand the writings of the gods. . . ."

"We," said David Haslup, "according to the ancient stories, are descended from the gods. Listen, my friends, there are many things in these papers of my brother. I believe them. I believe in that vast cavern. I believe in those strange people. Does not our history show that we ourselves, digging down, and west, south and north, have encountered other people, always like ourselves, whose origin was the same as ours? Why could there not be people different

from us, and of course, inferior? Is it impossible to close the eyes and imagine that our roof were pushed up and up and up, endlessly, for a vast period of time, until our cavern became as vast as that which Frank reported? I can imagine it. So can we all. And for ages it has been an axiom of our people that what we can imagine we can do."

"Take care, David!" said George Blake.

"I've passed the point of taking care, George," said David Haslup. "I've read strange things in these papers. Weapons, for example. Frank wrote down their descriptions, how they were operated. From his descriptions it comes to me that we might possibly, through our scientists, create weapons."

"For *slaughter*?" said Jan Schmidt, aghast.

"Capable of besting the weapons of the 'Mongols'!" said David Haslup.

"Well, and *then* what?" said George Blake.

"Listen," said Haslup, "to what our First Records say. 'David Haslup, with all the known survivors of what had been a mighty nation, called the United States, gathered them about him in "The Valley of Hell Roaring Creek", in Bear-tooth Mountain, and said that he knew of a cavern in which they could hide from sure destruction at the hands of the enemy. He took them into this cavern with him, closed the way behind'—and now, here we are, thirty-nine generations later, the United States of Sanctuary! I say, then, let us check this story. Let us go out by the way which we entered, and see what there is to see!"

"But that way, eastward," whispered Blake, "has been taboo for hundreds of years. . . ."

"Twenty-six hundred!" said David Haslup calmly. "But perhaps the taboo was established so that we would not venture forth until we were strong enough to do battle with the invaders. Who has the courage, now, to go with me into the forbidden First Sanctuary, to see what we can see?"

"The gods will strike us dead!" said Blake.

"I am at peace with my gods," said Jan Schmidt calmly. "I will go with you, David."

"I'll go wherever Jan goes," said

Blake quickly. To David's amazement all the other Elders—all of whom looked like young, virile men—were soon brought into agreement.

"We'll go, first," said David, taking command by divine right, "and then we will tell our people what we plan—if any plan is made—and begin the invention of weapons of invincible power!"

ALL the Elders went with David Haslup to the forbidden First Sanctuary—and the gods did not strike them dead. They looked at David, and George Blake said:

"If Frank Haslup was wronged, let his ashes be brought to the Haslup Columbarium, his good name be restored. I regret it deeply that he may have died knowing how grievously he was misjudged."

"He knows," said David Haslup quietly, "wherever his soul may be roaming. Think of it no more. For he, too, was of the gods!"

The time of the strange, somehow eerie discussion was five in the afternoon. The date was June 17, A.D. 4539.

The United States of Sanctuary began to arm for the Exodus, feeling as they did so that they were flying into the faces of the invisible gods. But time passed and the gods took no action, and they began to believe, with David Haslup, that the gods of their people were with them.

Sanctuary, which had been peaceful in repose for generations, was humming like a hive—though none in Sanctuary had the remotest idea of the meaning of "hive."

How could they, when they had lived, deep under the Rockies, for thirty-nine generations?

II

PREPARATION

THERE was a sort of lost feeling in David Haslup when he thought of leaving Sanctuary at all. It had never occurred to him that it was possible, until after the death of Frank. Now he realized what it might mean. Sanctuary hadn't been enlarged for several generations, and David knew its every nook and cranny as he knew

the outlines of his own Meditation Room. He knew its corridors of soft stone, into which the feet sank restfully if one cared to walk.

He knew its deep shafts where there had once been elevators, before Sanctuarians had learned the secret of anti-gravity—deep shafts now, up and down which Sanctuarians dropped or rose so easily. The flight of David's people, wherever they wished to go in Sanctuary, was smooth, effortless. And if they did not wish to stir from their rocky abodes they had but to sit in their own Meditation Rooms, and converse telepathically with anyone in Sanctuary whom they desired. Televi-rings were common property, as were anti-gravity shoes and skull-caps.

According to legend the first electrician had evolved from a queer kind of time-piece, the hands of which were visible in the dark, an artificial sun. Now there was one of these in every corridor, with smaller ones for the homes. Homes, set in the columns which upheld the various stony levels, were the utmost in comfort. One did not need to leave them, ever, for anything, even to visit.

Those homes, inside and out, were miracles of architecture, miracles of Sanctuarian sculpture. Architects had taken pride in finding new designs for homes, boasting that no two of them in the United States were alike—that they were as different as the fingerprints of their owners.

Delicate curves, beautiful columns—Sanctuary was a vast cathedral that seemed to be filled with soundless music.

Nobody ever ate food. The crude, detestable habit of stuffing the oral orifice with pieces of vegetable and animal matter had vanished generations before, with the invention of the first Restoring Booth, wherein a being could sit and absorb the necessities of life from vibrations in the booths themselves. One absorbed what one needed, and no more, so there was not a single fat person in all Sanctuary. From the Restoring Booth for a given locality, to making all Sanctuary a vast Restoring Booth was but a step. Now one never was hungry or thirsty, for when hunger or thirst was imminent, the body received it from invisible rays that permeated Sanctuary.

Perfection! That might have been Sanctuary's other name. But what

might happen to it if it were opened to alien feet? How could one know, when one knew nothing of aliens?

David Haslup, George Blake and Jan Schmidt set themselves the task of absorbing the ancient books, prepared by their remotest ancestors, who claimed to have come into First Sanctuary from "the surface." David privately thought the first David Haslup something of a braggart, for obviously all the things he said could not be true—though Frank Haslup's report indicated that they might be, at least approximately.

And if the things were true . . .

The Elders absorbed the books and came to the conclusion gradually that perhaps Frank Haslup was right. Books? There were many kinds of books. Their contents could be absorbed by reading, or photographically, for each book had as a frontispiece a visi-photographic device which could be connected with the human brain. A "reader" pressed his forehead against the device, and the contents of the books were etched on his memory never to be removed, unless for some reason he desired it. Then he could ask any Elder for the boon of forgetfulness, and the memory could be erased, washed clean from the screen of his brain.

David and the other Elders found the old books absorbingly interesting—and authoritative.

When they had finished, and the making of weapons went on apace, they were in agreement on what they wished to do: break the old taboo that forbade excavation to the east, and venture forth into the vast cavern, if such there proved to be. They agreed, too, that Sanctuarians should be told. Heaven knew they were curious enough, with all the new activity forced upon them.

So, with all the Elders about him, with George Blake on his left and Jan Schmidt—the first Jan Schmidt had been a laborer at the crucibles, a mighty Tubal-cain whose physical heritage of great strength had persisted for thirty-eight more generations—on his right, David Haslup called upon Sanctuary to "listen."

WHEN he knew that he had the attention of his people, he thought into his televi-ring, knowing that his thoughts were thus recorded on the

brains of all his subjects.

"It is time," he told them, "that you knew the plans of your Elders. All of you know our legends, how the first of us came into the cavern when it was small, and made it gradually larger as we became fruitful and multiplied. For generations those early experiences of our ancestors have been regarded as myths. My brother Frank went out of Sanctuary, through the rocks, and came back with a wild report we all believed untrue—so that now his ashes repose in dread, grim Black Columbarium. We have come to the conclusion that his reports were true. His ashes, however, remain in Black Columbarium until we are sure.

"Outside—wherever outside may be—there are probably hordes and hordes of alien people who will destroy us on sight. Frank Haslup brought back reports of the weapons they use. And his reports fill us with awe of these people of whom we can scarcely conceive. However, in the old legend, the ancestors of those people took from our ancestors vast lands and caverns that had belonged to them. We came into Sanctuary with hope in our hearts that the day would come when we could return to our lost land, regain it for our own. We believe that the time has come, for here we have perfection, beyond which nothing can be attained. We've been sated with perfection. We have known no strife, no sorrow, no worries, for generations. Perhaps it has not been good for us. In any case, we enter a period of transition. Men, women and children may die. We may lose our lives. We may lose all Sanctuary to alien people. For this reason we wish the people of Sanctuary to say whether they will make the venture!"

He paused, to give them time to think.

Their answer came in a strange way, in a sound that had never within the memory of mortal man, been heard in Sanctuary. The whole vast cavern rocked and shook and vibrated with the sound. Startled, David turned to the other Elders.

George Blake grinned. There was excitement in his face.

"They have gone back to first principles, David," he said. "They have, in their excitement, disregarded the televi-rings, and answer you with their audible voices. So Sanctuary sounds with

one vast cry of approval for all you do! Even if we turned against you now, David, all Sanctuary would be with you! Once again you are acclaimed leader of the United States of Sanctuary!"

David's face flushed with pleasure. Blake was probably right. The roar of approval still rocketed and rang through the vast cavern the sons of men and women had excavated from the living rock. David televised for silence, and silence came at once.

"There is no need for that type of training mentioned in old books," he said, "to prepare us for physical combat—for the bodies of all of us are perfect. We have, to begin with, anti-gravity, which the aliens know only in its rudiments. Their machinery for levitation is cumbersome, rough. There is an advantage for us. They possess crude weapons that slay at a distance. We will have weapons of such devastating power that nothing can stand against them. Even so, some of us, many of us, perhaps even all of us in the end, may be slain. Do you still approve?"

Again Sanctuary shook with the vibrations of the vast shout of approval. David could not forebear a grin that made him look like a young boy which, after all, he really was, at ninety odd. There wasn't a sprinkling, even, of grey in his red hair. He had twice been a father since his ninetieth birthday. He looked the leader born—the general leading his forces to victory. His first recorded ancestor had led the ancestors of the people he now addressed, into First Sanctuary. It was a fitting torch for him to pick up.

Then, there was General Selig, descendant of a General Selig who had commanded the forces of Absaroka, generations ago, when Absarokans had broken into Sanctuary from the south, and been absorbed, gradually, by Sanctuarians. Selig had clung to a certain military tradition, and would certainly be a valuable man in case of war.

David now commended Selig to Sanctuary as his Chief of Staff. The other Elders would each command the men of their own political subdivisions.

David found, when an extemporaneous census was taken, that Sanctuary could muster three million men. Women and children would be left in Sanctuary, together with men too old to fight, but not

too old to father children. Thus, in the event of catastrophe on the mad adventure, Sanctuary would be reborn down other corridors of the generations.

WHEN David had finished, General Bertram Selig took over the marshalling of forces—and Sanctuary was filled with forces of strong men, marching; with forces of strong men practising at strange maneuvers in space; with forces gradually being armed with weapons turned out in myriads by the scientists of the great cavern.

There were reflectors, for example, which picked up the rays of the artificial suns, amplified them thousands of times, so that anyone in their rays could be reduced to cinders instantly.

There were disintegrators, with quartz bores which, turned on a human being, simply caused him to vanish, simply—well, disintegrated him, as though he had never been. The time it required was less by far than the blinking of an eye.

There were super-magnets, sensitive to any known element, which could move anything desired; that might have pulled Sanctuary down about the heads of its people, but for the nullifiers which muffled their muzzles.

"Nothing," said Selig, exultantly, "can stand against it, whether human or metallic. And now, David Haslup, we are ready—with three million men. However, David . . ."

"Yes?"

"If this cavern we seek is really so much vaster than ours, we may face a hundred, a thousand times our own number of enemies!"

"We are superior," said David Haslup haughtily. "What can prevail against us, when even the puniest of our weapons, which even a child can grasp, can destroy anything it touches, within a radius of two miles?"

"I trust you are right, David," said Selig, dubiously.

"So do I, Selig. I think I am. Now, if we are ready, select a reconnoitering party to go with me through First Sanctuary and into—if tradition be true—the area once known as Hell Roaring Creek, in the midst of the Beartooth Range!"

"Yes, sir. I shall command it myself, if you will permit me!"

"Marshal your men in First Sanctu-

ary, beyond the area of the Columbariums, within an hour. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. I trust that time in the vast cavern outside coincides with ours, and that we shall break into that cavern while there is yet light . . ."

Two thousand men, led by Selig, massed in First Sanctuary, sacred to the memory of the founders of Sanctuary, and David Haslup called forward the Disintegratormen.

"Make me a way into the east," he commanded. "Continue on until we break through into some space or other—no matter how long it takes."

The Disintegratormen, awe in their faces, and perhaps a touch of terror, got busy. Walls of rock vanished before their invisible rays. In less than an hour there appeared an orifice, and a glimmer of light.

Weird light it was, filled with strange shadow—and through the orifice came a whispering wind.

"Listen for a time," said David, "lest there be enemies watching for this to happen."

They listened. Then Disintegratormen enlarged the opening, and David Haslup, thirty-ninth in direct line of descent from the first David Haslup—who had come this way *into* the cavern—stepped out of the bowels of the mountain, with awe-stricken men massed behind him.

For the first time in all those generations an inhabitant of the United States gazed upon the shadows of a gargantuan mountain, moving into the east as the sun went down—for the mighty Rockies were behind, to the west, of David Haslup.

A vast chasm yawned at their feet, and out of it came a roaring sound. They looked and saw white spumed water.

"Hell Roaring Creek!" whispered Haslup. "Then this much of the old legend is true, and on the banks of that brawling stream my first known ancestor reached his desperate decision to go into the ground to escape the enemy—with the remnants of his people!"

"David!" said George Blake, hoarsely. "David! Look directly upward. What are those pale orbs, close against the blue dome of this cavern into which we have broken?"

DAVID looked, and gasped, but he remembered all he had read, all that Frank Haslup had seen.

"Their name, George," he said, "is stars. They are countless in number. Their light will be brighter when the sun has gone down."

"The sun?" repeated Jan Schmidt. "What sort of a cavern is it that has but one? Verily are we of a superior race! These aliens, if any there be, must be slothful indeed, that they have provided themselves with but one sun! Come, David, let us find them!"

"I do not think," said Haslup, "that we shall have far to seek. For look to the left, along the canyon, out onto that vast level expanse. Note the towers, high ones, with pointed spires. Those things are the abodes of men, my friends! Note, too, even as brother Frank said, that their tops do not uphold the roof of their cavern!"

"It is vast, vast," whispered Blake.

"Yes," said David in awe. "For note that we cannot see the limits of it. Did not my brother Frank say that this cavern was limitless? Send back a messenger, Selig, with word from me to remove my brother's ashes from the Black Columbarium, and deposit them in a place of honor among those of his ancestors!"

The shadow of the mountain was touching the western walls of the city on the plains, beyond the mountains.

They saw no one moving, anywhere. Apprehensively they quitted the mouth of their cavern, marched down a ravine to Hell Roaring Creek, and to a hard-packed road that led out of the mountains.

They were all uncomfortable. There was a wind down the canyon, and they did not know what it was—for it chilled them, and made their bodies shake, their teeth rattle in their mouths.

But they gritted their teeth—as though remembering bellicosity out of their distant past—gripped their weapons more tightly, and continued the march. At Selig's command, every few minutes, they left two men as part of a line of communication with Sanctuary.

They reached the end of the canyon as fearful darkness settled over the unknown world ahead of them—as the spires and towers they had seen, burst into a dazzle of flame; brilliant dots of fire which brought the city into view again.

"Their sun," said Jan Schmidt disgustedly, "must be weak. It goes to

sleep as though it were something human! But where?"

They marched out onto the plain, turned and looked back—and saw the mighty rampart of the Rockies for the first time, out of whose womb they had just been born.

III

CONTACT

SLOWLY the Sanctuarians moved across the plain toward the city, George Blake, from old records, had concocted a kind of map. . . .

"The city," he said, "must be Billings and Cody, combined, with whatever other cities there were in this section in our forefathers' time. David, it is all true. Our forefathers *did* come from outside!"

"And we," said David quietly, "are no more divine than anyone else. Our forefathers were simply people—and there is still, outside this cavern, another Outside. But where is it, and what are its limits? You know, George, I am pleased to make a discovery!"

"Yes!"

"That I am a human being like all other human beings, with the will to good and evil, with passions and desires and hungers. I trust you have noticed that this vast cavern is not a great Restoring Booth? I can feel a gnawing in my stomach that refuses to be satisfied. We will have to return to Sanctuary to be restored."

"If," said Blake, "we ever get back. I've an idea that there will be trouble in plenty for us when we reach this great city, whatever it is, by whom occupied."

"They are people, like us, though their color may be different," said David.

"And their forefathers drove our forefathers into the earth to save their lives. Turn, David, and look back!"

David stopped, turned again, gasped. "That mighty raised place on the floor of this outside cavern," he said, "is the roof of Sanctuary, and it is merely a raised place on the floor of *this* cavern? What mortal man can know what greater caverns may lie outside this one?"

"It is a subject for investigation," said Selig. "I suggest that, exercising

all due care, we proceed to the area of twinkling lights."

"By rising and moving thence," said David Haslup. "I confess that walking tires me—when there is no means of restoration."

HASLUP and his men rose easily into the air, by turning on their anti-gravitational force, and moved swiftly toward the city. It was an eerie experience for all of them, for with darkness over the face of the ground they could not make out its details. They saw one another like moving shadows against the dim light of the stars—and a gibbous moon that rose from behind the spires of the city.

Haslup signaled, with his televisi-ring, for his men to rise to a height equal to the tallest spire of the city. He preferred to look down upon it, rather than travel through its corridors and streets, which looked so much like traps—though he did not know exactly what a trap might be.

Great sounds came out of the city. Roaring noises, as of crude machinery at work.

"Gross!" snorted Jan Schmidt, who traveled close beside Haslup. "*Our* self-repairing machinery works without so much as a whisper of sound. It is plain that we are far in advance of these barbarians!"

"And therefore we should be able to overcome them," said Haslup quietly.

"Perhaps, but when their numbers are obviously vast beyond computing, I am inclined to wonder if our superiority is sufficient—and glad that we came forth with but a small contingent of our people. If we are destroyed, we shall scarcely be missed."

"Let there be no thought of destruction."

Neither man seemed to notice that they talked audibly, though that means of communication had scarcely been used between them in their lifetimes. They were like two moths against the darkness, under the moon, trailed by other moths that flew without sound, without wings, powered by anti-gravity, directed by thought.

The mighty city swept under them, the roaring of its activities coming up to them. Haslup noted the sharpness of the spires, thought of being impaled upon

one of them, and shuddered. The city represented a gargantuan danger.

Yet, so far, their presence above the city had not been noticed.

"I have the urge," said George Blake, swinging in on David's other side, "to see what our disintegrating weapons will do to their buildings—and whoever may be inside them."

"Well, why not? I see no people hanging in space, as we are able to do. It will be one sure way of ascertaining what sort of reception they will give us."

"And the destruction of human life, what of that?"

"They destroyed our people in the long ago, by millions, according to the ancient records. Why, then, should we have mercy? And they are barbarians! Their destruction will not rest on my conscience."

"Then permit me to be the first to attack, David!" said George Blake.

"Permission is granted!"

Instantly George Blake dropped like a plummet, straight toward the spires of the enemy, guiding himself, however, so as not to strike the spires. David watched him go, excitement mounting in his breast. He saw George Blake grasp his disintegrator in his hand preparatory to releasing its devastating, invisible rays.

Blake hovered just above the thickest of the towers—thickest here, in any event, though higher towers, set more closely together, could be seen further to the east—and began to play his disintegrator over a wide area below him.

Almost instantly, in a wide circle under Blake, the towers and spires disappeared. They simply vanished in a twinkling, and where they had been was a pit of darkness, for with the vanishing of the buildings, their lights vanished, too.

Blake rose back to Haslup's level, chuckling.

"I'll wager I got thousands of them, David. I look for vast excitement."

"So do I," said David grimly, "and we may not like what it brings!"

Suddenly, out of the city, came a vast roaring of sound. Screams of dismayed men, women and children, who had seen a whole city block vanish as though miraculously made invisible, with every living thing inside it. David had never heard cries of dismay or terror, but deep down inside him he knew the meaning of

those cries. He turned the seal of his television ring into his palm. . . .

"Maybe I can pick up their thoughts," he said.

He could. Terror came to his brain in waves. Terror, and fury—and the latter gave David a gone feeling in the pit on his stomach which he knew was not hunger.

"Higher," he signaled his men, "in order to give ourselves room to battle, if they possess our own power of anti-gravity."

THEY rose into the night sky until even the Rockies were far below them. Their ears rang with the altitude, a fact which startled and frightened them a little. Then David ordered all to keep their eyes fixed on the city.

Rising out of the city were countless globes of light, several times the size of men. Those globes sent their light out in all directions, and David gasped.

"They possess the power of anti-gravity," he signaled, "and they do not travel through space singly, as we do, but several persons in each of those anti-gravitational globes control it. If they possess weapons which may hurl projectiles along their beams of light. . . ."

The globes were rising with amazing speed—far faster than the Sanctuarians could rise. Moreover, their speed laterally was faster by far, almost too fast for the eye to see.

"Back to Sanctuary!" said David Haslup. "As fast as you can make it. Bear south and west. Note the mountain peak, sharp as a needle, below us in that direction. That is Chrome Mountain, directly opposite the point where we broke through. Get over that, a little to the north of it, and *fall!*"

Terror gave them speed, because it gave them speed of thought—and thought controlled the direction and intensity of their anti-gravity. The Sanctuarians sped for Chrome Mountain, keeping high against the moon, watching those glowing globes with growing fear.

David dropped back to the rear of his moth-like formation, toward which the enemy were rising with the speed almost of light.

"A volunteer," he said, "to attack the nearest of the globes!"

Instantly one of his men dropped, straight toward the rising globes. Three

of them were quite close together, and the Sanctuarian unlimbered his disintegrator as he dropped. David held his breath, fully expecting something deadly to emanate from the globes. But nothing did—until it was too late. The Sanctuarian merely directed the invisible spray of his disintegrator upon the three globes, moving the muzzle like the nozzle of a hose—and the three globes vanished.

Occupants of the other globes could not possibly miss what had happened to the three. They broke away from one another. They bumped together, caromed off. Their formation had been thrown into disorder by the sudden catastrophe that had befallen their vanguard.

Then, as the Sanctuarian was rising back to join his own, a thin orange pencil of light sprayed from one of the globes. It touched the Sanctuarian at his knees—and all his limbs below the knee vanished. And with their disappearance went that man's power to resist gravity. The poor devil, from a height of fifteen thousand feet and more, plunged like a falling stone toward the jagged crest of the Beartooth.

His wild screams came back for a few split seconds. Then he was gone.

"Was it an accident that they destroyed his anti-gravity shoes?" said David hoarsely, to Jan Schmidt. "If it was not, and the rest of us are struck by whatever force it is that they employ, we shall all be hurled to destruction atop the roof of Sanctuary."

"Then we must waste no further time," said Jan Schmidt. "I am not afraid, nor am I a fool. I see no reason why we should experiment with death."

"If," said George Blake grimly, "we can avoid doing so! There are a great many of them, David!"

More orange and yellow pencils of flame were spearing out from the globes of light. They were reaching the bodies of the men who seemed to be moving so effortlessly through space. Fully a hundred Sanctuarians were destroyed by those beams. Some merely vanished in midair, and none could see where they went. Some were touched on one part of their bodies or another—and disappeared.

"Their force is as powerful as our

own, and of course allied to it," said Jan Schmidt.

"And their method of travel is faster than ours!" said David. "No more dawdling. Shut off anti-gravity and plunge!"

The Sanctuarians obeyed. They dropped, altogether, like thrown rocks. They dropped faster than the globes of light could follow them. The shadows of Hell Roaring Creek rose swiftly to meet them. Some of the Sanctuarians forgot to put the power on again, and so break their fall, and were dashed to pieces on the sides of the mountains. Only terror stronger than thought made that happen to them. The Sanctuarians were frightened of the enemy—and none among them had seen the face of a single "Mongol."

A mere remnant of the Sanctuarians reached the ravine, and the black opening which led into Sanctuary. David Haslup bade them all go deeply into the cavern.

David himself stood in the opening, watching fully a dozen of the globes come easily into the ravine, and settle to rest among the shadows of Chrome Mountain and the Beartooth Range of which it was a part.

THEN, calmly, David Haslup turned and with his tiny magnet, merely one of his weapons, closed the door to Sanctuary, so that it looked as though it had never been opened—himself remaining outside.

He would risk no more of his men for the time being. As their leader, however, it was up to him to find out all he could about the enemy.

He slipped into the shadows himself, so that beams of light from the globes could not touch him—and tried his best to keep to the shadows as he grimly stalked the nearest of the globes. He had one desire: to see its occupants, see what manner of men they were.

He stepped on something that squirmed underfoot. Without thinking he jumped high, and far. He heard a vicious rattling sound. It made the hair at the back of his neck rustle as though in a cold breeze. For the life of him he could not understand why.

That squirming thing was alive, but since it wasn't human, what could it possibly be?

Were more of the old books being proved? Was it really true that life took other shapes than that of man? He resolved, after he had investigated the globes, to find the squirming thing and take it with him into Sanctuary for more and closer study. He marked the spot from which he had jumped. He saw two tiny dots of lambent flame—and the rattling sound continued.

From one of the globes came half a dozen manlike forms. They came from a door that had opened without sound. They were talking a queer kind of language that made no sense to David Haslup—except that he recognized terror in their tones.

That one fact was his first grim satisfaction since the Exodus.

IV

CURIOSITY

DAVID HASLUP had lost quite too many of his Sanctuarians, though he knew he would not be blamed for them—certainly never more than he blamed himself. But the "outside" was his responsibility, which he had now accepted. While he watched the yellow men debouch from the glowing globe, he televised his people in the cavern, telling them that he had stayed outside deliberately, that he was alive and well, and would return to them when he had personally reconnoitered the enemy. One man, he said, could do the job better than many.

This done, David moved through the dark, keeping always some hummock of stone between himself and the glowing globe, toward the strange anti-gravity machine. He had no urge to expose himself to the devastating orange-pencil rays of their disintegrators, or whatever they used.

Not until he crouched behind his last bit of cover did he realize that if anyone were left within the globe, he was sure to be discovered. He listened carefully. Then he used his televisi-ring, trying to pick up the thoughts of any "Mongols" who might be left behind. As he listened he again heard the eerie rattling sound in the rocks, and wondered once more why it made the hair on the back of his neck

shift. He had no conception of any save human life, and so knew nothing of rattlesnakes. For ages fossils found in the rocks of Sanctuary had held no meaning, because for ages Sanctuary had not been extended, and the face of its walls had been covered with gorgeous paintings—and David had never been an omnivorous reader. The strange reaction of his body to the whirring sound told him, however, that there was deadly danger.

More danger, perhaps, even than reposed in the glowing globe. He hesitated there behind a rock, listening to soft whirring sounds of another kind that came from inside the glowing globe. Machinery of some sort, ticking over, awaiting the return of those who had left the globe.

But no human thought impinged upon David's—the globe was empty of any human occupant. He stared through the dark toward the face of the cliff that masked the entrance to the cavern of Sanctuary, and knew that the "Mongols" were at loss to understand how, and whither, the strange flying men had disappeared. He could read puzzlement in their voices, though he could understand no word.

Again he made use of his televisoring, concentrating on reading the thoughts of his enemies—and those thoughts came to him, interpreted because, whatever the language of a speaker or thinker might be, his thoughts were like the thoughts of other people.

"They've gone straight into the rocks," came one statement, to David's delight that he could understand, though with difficulty. "They're strange visitors from the middle of the earth!"

"What use," asked another, "would wings be to people under the earth? I tell you, Lun Jao, that they came from outside. We have conquered all the known world, so they cannot be of this world, that is evident. No, they come from outside somewhere—from the Moon, or Mars, or Venus. . . ."

David Haslup judged that those were place names, though they struck no responsive cord in his memory. "Outside" meant something to him. But where, from here, was "Outside?" He lifted his eyes to the heavens where now the stars were so bright and twinkling, where the gibbous moon rode over the ramparts of the Rockies, and had an

inkling of the answer: "Outside" was somewhere beyond those twinkling bodies.

"Or perhaps right on them," thought David, "for they are probably much larger than they appear, because of my distance from them! Could those be the bodies Frank reported to be so far away that it took light billions of years to pass between them, or to reach the floor of the vast cavern in which I stand?"

He went back, mentally, to the Mongols.

"There can be nothing to fear from inside the earth," said the man called Lun Jao. "What can come to us from there, when we cover all the habitable land of the globe?"

What globe, David wondered? This one he faced? But nothing on it was habitable, though its interior was—and there were many other globes; from which, at the moment, other Mongols were debouching. Was the earth itself a globe? If so, upon what did it rest? Was it as far from all its surface to those twinkling stars as it was from this portion? Did that mean that the earth itself swam in space, as the stars and the moon seemed to? It was an exciting speculation.

He "listened" again to the Mongols.

"We can search for those who fell," said Lun Jao, "through the mountains, though that will be a great task. If we can find no trace of living winged men. . . ."

"They did not have wings, Lun Jao," said the first "voice," "but moved through the air without them."

"Then must they indeed be men from Outside! For look you, Min Shan, if they had no wings they must have jumped when we thought them flying, which means that they come from some planet where atmospheric pressure is vaster by far than here—where, in fact, it would be impossible for men in our form to evolve at all!"

"Well, Khan, we saw them, did we not? At least that is *some* proof of something."

"Yes, and we saw, or thought we saw them go right into the solid rock, which none of our people can do. So *that* was a delusion. Perhaps all of it was. Perhaps it was a delusion that we thought a vast section of our city of Menan was destroyed in the winking of an eye! It

would not surprise me to find, on our return, that we had seen nothing of the sort, that it had not happened."

"And what of our three vanished monopters? Did we imagine that, too?"

"No! And for their loss we shall have vengeance even though it may take us generations to find whence the wingless men came, and to reach their planetary habitation."

DAVID HASLUP was almost convulsed with laughter. These people were so simple, so naive, to believe such nonsense! Nobody in Sanctuary was quite so dumb, not even the least educated of his subjects. It was strange what fancies men could lend themselves to. Verily were Sanctuarians the wisest of men!

He could not foresee, of course, how often, or how soon, he would have to revise his own opinion of the superiority of Sanctuarians, and of himself.

He studied the globe while the Mongols searched for clues. "Monopter," he thought, means "alone-winged," though the globe had no wing at all that he could see. Maybe the globe itself was a wing of some sort. He decided on a bold move. If he lost, he was lost indeed. He stepped into the light from the globe, and passed through the door. He was excited, but his fingers obeyed the will of his brain swiftly. A door had opened, so a door would close. A globe had flown through the air, therefore it would fly again—and he wanted to know how, and where, and why—and by what the globe was operated.

He heard shouts of dismay from the Mongols as he shut the door of their globe, and found himself in a globular room—save for the floor which was raised across the lower quarter of the globe—of comfortable dimensions. There were many buttons here and there, in a panel on one wall. Buttons were to press. There were markings by each button, but they meant nothing to him.

So he simply pressed them all, one after the other, and trusted that something would happen!

It did!

He could see out through the walls of the globe as though they had not existed, and along beams of light which appeared to emanate from facets in the glass-like substance—fused quartz, he thought—in

any direction he might look.

And just before everything vanished he saw a yellow, bearded face, red-rimmed eyes, and fang-teeth—and knew that he was the first Sanctuarian in thirty-nine generations to see the face of a Mongol. There was something hideous about it, if he had had time to see what it was. But he had no time. He saw the ramparts of the Rockies shoot past him, dropping away so fast they were a blur. His feet felt rooted to the floor. The globe swayed gently. A whining sound seemed to bathe it.

He was shooting out toward those twinkling stars faster than any Sanctuarian within memory had ever gone anywhere!

He looked down—for the floor was transparent, too—and saw the mountains over Sanctuary as a blackish mist which was drawing away with amazing speed. Far down, other globes were rising, but never as fast as he traveled. They would not overtake him, he was sure of that, for the globes were probably of equal speed—this one might even be faster, since it belonged to the leader of the Mongols—so he might as well enjoy himself while he had a chance.

"Now is my chance to prove or disprove the statements of Frank," he thought. "I'll make my way to the nearest one of those stars, and bring back a full report."

The globe kept rising swiftly, but strangely enough the stars did not grow in size, did not seem to be getting any closer. It was most puzzling. There probably was something very much wrong, though he couldn't tell just what it was.

Moreover, the globe was slowing down. Had height anything to do with it? And how was the globe powered?

Safe from pursuit, he felt sure, he did some experimenting with the buttons on the panel. He pressed one, and became lightheaded—so he pressed it again. It probably had something to do with the oxygen supply inside the globe. He pressed another and the Rockies moved westward under him, another and they moved east, then south, then north. He had found out how to steer the thing.

Moreover, he could steer to any point of the compass. Now, how was it powered? He gave some time to that, looking down occasionally to make sure that

the Mongols were not closing in on him.

He came to the conclusion that the Mongols were in *advance* of the Sanctuarians in the matter of anti-gravity. The discovery chagrined him, for it was so obvious. The globe itself was simply an enlargement of the anti-gravitational shoes of the Sanctuarians! But that couldn't be, either, else the flight of the wingless men would not have puzzled the Mongols. Still, it *was* such an adaptation! Therefore the answer was obvious; the Mongols had perfected anti-gravity machines in size sufficient to hold several men. The Sanctuarians had adapted it to individuals. The Mongols rode within their anti-gravity apparatus, Sanctuarians rode atop theirs.

"We are still the wiser race," thought David Haslup, "for we have adapted it to the needs of individuals."

HE remembered that the sun had vanished in the west. Now, curious, he set the globe moving in that direction. It traveled at almost the same speed it had risen into the air—and Haslup gasped, time after time, with awe-stricken amazement. The Rockies, the roof of Sanctuary, were nothing, compared to the lower ground about them.

A growing wall, or gigantic fan, of light, was growing in the west. Haslup headed toward it at top speed. He looked back occasionally, but could see no pursuers. Only when he was sure he had lost them did he remember that he, on the way out to Menan, had left communication groups behind him. And there were Mongols afoot in the mountains! Would they discover his sentinels? What would they do to them?

But the sentinels would surely have seen everything, have hidden themselves away beyond discovery. In any case it was too late to worry about them. Besides, the stranded Mongols might have entered other globes after Haslup had stolen the one.

He wanted to see the meaning of that vast fan of light, which was growing constantly brighter—and finally, traveling at a speed of which he had no conception, he saw it. He saw the sun going down all over again! A vast, orange segment of it, sinking into something vast, sprawling and black. He soon remembered what that level expanse was: the Pacific Ocean, and it was swallowing the sun!

What a strange land this was, outside Sanctuary!

It frightened him. But he must get closer to that ocean. He dropped swiftly, listening to the shrieking of wind past his globe. He experimented with the controls, to make sure that he would not drop right into the water, until he was sure of his ability to manage the globe.

Slowly, then, he began to make things out on the surface of the Pacific, across whose bosom in past ages, the Mongols had come to destroy his people. Vast, black, stretching to everywhere. . . .

Thoughtfully he studied it. Vast things moved on it—so Frank had been right again! Buildings actually *floated* on the water—buildings of a shape he had never seen before, even in inventive Sanctuary. Some floated one way, some floated others, and if . . .

He sped eastward again, and picked up the land, and gasped at fresh wonders—for all the land, as far as he could see, was a city of vast spires and towers, reaching further into the void than any he had hitherto seen.

And the vast city was dark, and David Haslup thought he could guess why: the Mongols had warned all their land to darken itself, because it was threatened by mysterious forces from "Outside."

Haslup shouted his exultation as an idea came to him: if an attack from Outside were expected, an attack would be delivered—in as many different places as David Haslup could manage!

But it couldn't be done in the globe. It would be seen, had doubtless been seen already. David knew that he was now little higher above the land than he would have been had he been against the dome of Sanctuary, that, therefore, it was safe to quit the globe.

He chuckled, feeling like a small boy up to no end of mischief, and set the globe to plummeting straight down toward—though he did not know it then—what had once, ages ago, been the heart of San Francisco.

But before the speed became too great, he loosened the door. He stepped blithely off into space . . . and, whirling over and over, somersaulting, he almost, for a few hair-raising seconds, equalled the fall of the globe.

For those ghastly moments he thought that his own anti-gravity equipment had failed him.

But, just above one of those sharp spires, he regained control—and slowed the speed of his fall. He heard the globe crash into the city with a terrific sound.

Then, gently, he lowered himself against one of the spires, clung to it, edged easily, surely down, until he stood upon a ledge. He was wise, now, in the way of shadows. He hid in one of them. His hand trembled as he directed his disintegrator at the very middle of the largest building within its range.

He pressed a small button. The muffler on the disintegrator's muzzle flicked open. The unbelievably cataclysmic power in the disintegrator speared out, toward the building David Haslup had marked.

The resulting sound was like the crack of doom. The building lost its middle. Its top crashed upon its lower segment, and the whole thing thinned out as it fell—dropping vast pieces of masonry into the canyons which were the city's streets.

David did not wait to hear the sounds of anguish that would surely come. For he saw globes rising from the city, and coming from the east, and their light would surely see him.

He shot across a yawning chasm between tall buildings, to the ledge of a window. His magnet destroyed the glass. He did not wait to hear the shards strike below. He entered the building—and raced through the dark.

But not for long was the building dark. Even as he approached another wall, the inside of the building he had entered became light as day!

David Haslup, ruler of all Sanctuary, was caught like a rat in a trap!

V

INGENUITY

AND for the first time, in a bright light, he saw more than one of the Mongols, including several women. How they happened to be in a top floor of a tall building, in the midst of great masses of gargantuan machinery, he didn't pause to think about. That they were amazed at sight of him was obvious. The lights simply went on, and there he was. Perhaps his

breaking of the window had brought them on—but no, they hadn't lighted up until he was well into the darkness of the big room.

Yellow faces. Those of some of the men were bearded. Their eyes were almond shaped, though David did not have that name for them, merely noting that they tapered toward their inner corners. Those eyes were black, and the men were huge. The women were tall, willowy, slender, with the same kind of eyes. An anthropologist would have seen in them all, traces of many races. Had David known of other races, and been able to couple his knowledge with a statement he had heard at Bear-tooth, to the effect that Mongols had conquered all the habitable portions of the globe, he would have seen in those faces traces of all the peoples conquered. But he did not know that, and these people were simply, to him, vastly different from the people of Sanctuary.

His first real thought was: "How was Frank able to stay so long among these people, from whom he was so different?"

And then the Mongols were closing on him, the women with curiosity, the men with obvious intent to make him a prisoner.

David lifted his head to the far ceiling. He snapped the muffler on his disintegrator, the muzzle aimed at the ceiling's center. Instantly a hole appeared in the ceiling, and David was rising toward it, straight from the floor. Cries of superstitious terror burst from the lips of Mongol men and women alike. David, not wishing, somehow, to slay people he could see, and so in some small fashion knew, had narrowed the shutter on his disintegrator to the point where only a small hole was made in the ceiling, and therefore in each succeeding floor above, clear through the roof of the building.

Mongols grabbed at his ankles. He drew up his feet, just enough to escape the clutching hands. Then he was through the hole, gaining speed rapidly. He rose into another crowded room, where people had moved back suddenly from the inexplicable hole in the floor, to stare at it in awe and terror. Then they saw him shoot up through the hole, pass them swiftly, without visible effort, and vanish through the hole in the ceiling next above.

He could imagine, a little, their mys-

tification, even terror, so when their cries came to him as his speed increased, he could understand and appreciate their fear. And David was enjoying himself. Now, if he could remain free, and do the little, devastating things he had in mind, he would accomplish far more than he would have had he brought all able-bodied men out of Sanctuary. One man attracted little attention; many would have caused attacks by the anti-gravity globes of the Mongols, and countless Sanctuarians would inevitably have been killed.

David shot through the roof of the building, from a hole his disintegrator had made—just missing the topmost spire. Out in the cold night air he looked about him. Globes were rising all over the vast city, as far as he could see. He had certainly stirred the place up!

His keen eyes, as he hung there in space for a time—rather than rise to an altitude where he must inevitably be seen in the darting beams of the globes—searched for the next coign of vantage from which to play havoc with the enemy. He had resolved not to destroy the building where he had seen all the startled Mongols. It would have been too much like destroying people he knew.

Off to his right, and far down, there was a patch of shadow against the side of a building, which the beams from the globes, as yet, did not touch. David dropped down to its level, then moved through the air to the shadow, to take his stance on a window-ledge, some two hundred stories above the street. It was a precarious perch for anyone not equipped with anti-gravity shoes!

He stood there against the window for a little while, scarcely breathing, fearful that a huge hand might come smashing through the glass to capture him. But nothing of the sort happened. He walked easily to the end of the sill, noted that the shadow extended all along the side of the building, to the next corner—and calmly, one hand against the cold stone wall, “walked” on air to the next windowsill. He scarcely paused there, did not touch his feet to the sill actually. He could feel a steady vibration in the building, and knew that it, too, was a housing place for many machines, which must of necessity be important. From the far corner, after he had traversed the building-side, he spotted another patch

of shadow, far down, ahead and to the right. He flitted across the space between, easily as a bird, and still had escaped the fatal beams of the globes, which darted back and forth over the tops of the buildings, their beams playing into every conceivable nook and cranny. By this time, he thought, the occupants of the globes would know that a man of some kind, perhaps no more than one, had set the city by its ears.

He stood on another windowsill, back to the glass. A monstrous globe swept over the building he had just left, past the spire, outlining it against the night. David aimed his disintegrator at the globe, pressed the button—and the huge globe was cloven in twain. Men fell out of the wound he had made, somersaulting, screaming to the far street below. David did not pause, but swept the muzzle of the disintegrator to the building he had left, sweeping it slantwise from one upper corner, down and across to the ground, as a giant might slash with a tremendous sword.

THE two parts of the building slid apart. The upper half became a roaring avalanche, carrying thousands of tons of masonry into the street. And up from that street, to drown out the cries of the occupants of the globe he had smashed apart, came the cries of the doomed.

David did not wait to see what became of the standing half of the skyscraper. If it stood, well and good. It would be a monument to the power of the “people from Outside.” For the next hour he did not use his disintegrator at all, but flitted from shadow to shadow, spying out the city, realizing how abysmally destructive even one Sanctuarian could be against man-made structures. For of course all buildings in the path of his disintegrator ray, for a distance of two miles from where he had stood, had also suffered the slicing destruction his tiny disintegrator had caused. The destruction must have been a ghastly thing to contemplate.

Perhaps he should have had all those deaths on his conscience, but when he thought of all the millions of his own people who had been killed by the ancestors of these people, he could not feel anything at all—save the desire to destroy, and keep on destroying.

The globes still coursed back and forth, with dizzy speed, over the rooftops of the city whose Mongol name he did not know. Their beams played into every patch of shadow save, somehow, a given patch in which David Haslup crouched.

But something strange was happening to David. There was a grim gnawing in his stomach, as though something inside him were eating away at his stomach and intestines. For the life of him he could not figure out what was wrong. It was a pain that did not hinder his movements, was, even, not too painful—but it increased instead of diminishing, and he simply could not understand what was wrong.

Hunger? It was explained in some of the old books of Sanctuary, and perhaps that was what was wrong with him. He did not know, never until now, having known the pangs of hunger. But for the first time in his life he wished he might have something—nor did he know just what—to stuff in his mouth and swallow. Why such an urge should have come to him was an amazing thing.

"If it gets much worse," he told himself, "I'll return to Sanctuary and find out what is wrong with me—and I hope there is someone there who can tell me!"

It was the first time he had really doubted his own invincibility, his superiority.

But he wouldn't return just yet, not until he had figured out the plan which was slowly growing in his mind. It was a task for the Elders of Sanctuary, he knew that, for if any great risks were to be taken, they should take them. But first the details must be thought out in his mind.

There were twenty-four Elders besides himself.

He continued, by easy stages, to the north. Now and again he swung to the west, until he could see, down through the city's buildings, the black sprawl of the Pacific Ocean. Then he would swing inland, clinging to shadows, but keeping to a general northerly direction.

In this manner of travel he was able to look through many windows, without himself being seen. He saw many of the Mongols, men and women, sitting before machines, with wired caps fastened to their heads. He would have given much to know what they were doing, but did

not tune in on them with his televisi-ring, else he would have heard a strange story being broadcast, with fresh details added with each passing moment.

"All inhabitants of Yenpi are warned that our nation is being visited by beings from some outside world, against less. They seem to be people like us, save that their skin is white, and they can jump into the air for unbelievable distances—far beyond the height of any of our buildings. They possess instruments of destruction far and away beyond anything we know. They can destroy buildings instantly, in a vast area. Keep watch for them. They wear clothing that is skin-tight—and what we take to be clothing may even be their skins. It is estimated that fully a hundred thousand of them have reached our cities, and are going about their task of destruction. Since we have no known enemies in all the earth, they are obviously people from some other world. They are not natural enemies of ours, but are engaged in a war of conquest. All subjects of His Majesty, Gito, are requested to watch carefully for these strange outlanders. If one is seen he is to be captured at whatever it may cost us in lives destroyed. The High Command of Yenpi wishes to interrogate one of these strange beings and find out, by torture if necessary, what their plans are, and their numbers, as well as whence they come."

David Haslup, however, knew none of this, and it was perhaps well that he did not. He had no conception of torture, and might well have been curious enough about its meaning to have allowed himself to be captured for the purpose of finding out!

He kept on until the east began to grow light—and he had reached the amazing conclusion that the "sun" traveled all the way around the earth each day! Or else the earth turned about the sun. One could not be sure without testing one's conclusions scientifically, but it had to be one or the other.

AND when the world was lighted, he knew, he must be well under cover, where none could find him, or he would be captured for a certainty.

He began a swift "flight" into the east, knowing that almost anywhere in that direction he would reach the big hump on the floor of this vast cavern

which was the roof of Sanctuary. Having found that, he would simply go into the earth and be hidden. Then, by contacting his people via the televisi-ring, he would find his way back.

The stars paled as the run rose. The globes, he now saw—they had never ceased their hunt for one of the "hundred thousand"—were white against the growing dawn, and it would be but a matter of minutes before the lookouts of some of them would see him. Then, his capture or death would be certain.

He knew, when he first saw the bulk of the Rockies, that he could never hope to reach them. So he dropped to the street of the city, falling like a rock until he was within a few feet of it, then settling slowly.

People saw him and screamed in terror. Some of them ran from him. Some ran toward him, grim resolve in their faces to capture this one specimen of humanity they had been called upon to locate.

David Haslup stood on a hard surface which he knew had been laid down by the hands of man, because it was so smooth. He turned his disintegrator ray upon it. A black hole yawned. Haslup dropped easily into it, clear to its bottom.

There he looked up, to see all sorts of things falling toward him. His enemies, thinking he had trapped himself in the amazing pit he had somehow miraculously dug, were dropping upon him whatever they could find.

Haslup, before the first missile struck, calmly turned toward the east. The disintegrator in his hand had now been exchanged for his magnet. He pressed a tiny button on his cap, and the bottom of the pit was filled with light. His keen eyes spotted the stratification of the rocks. He applied the magnet to a section of rock—and nothing happened!

Missiles began to rain upon him—and desperately he used his disintegrator once more, sending a tunnel deep into the rock, horizontally. He stepped into that tunnel just as a rock almost as big as the pit came smashing onto the spot where he had been standing, effectually blocking the bottom of the pit. David Haslup then set himself the task of walking through the earth to the boundaries of Sanctuary.

The beginning was not difficult. He

simply studied the stratification of rocks, and used his super-magnet, pulling out sections into the tunnel itself, from right and left and ahead, until he had made a small cavern for himself.

This he filled with other bits of rock as he progressed so that, in effect, he moved toward Sanctuary through successive caverns that he excavated and filled as he went.

And ever the gnawing in his vitals was an increasing pain. Also, his legs were shaking, becoming rubbery. It would be ghastly if he did not last until he reached his objective.

He sped up his work. It was not heavy work, for the magnet was a magic thing of power to labor.

He dug a cavern, and filled it—and from the rock ahead filled *that* cavern, too. As he went he grinned to himself as he envisioned the efforts of Mongols to follow him on his walk through the earth itself.

And ever his light went with him, though the air was bad, and perspiration—though he did not know the name of it—burst from his every pore.

At last, when it seemed that he should long since have reached the western boundary of Sanctuary, he could go no further. If he started upward now he would simply rise into the mountains, which would be no help, for the mountains would be in process of being scoured now, too.

He sat down, turned the seal of his televisi-ring into his palm.

"Jan Schmidt!" he televised. "Jan Schmidt! Answer me, Jan Schmidt!"

Almost instantly through the earth came an answer, not from Jan Schmidt, but from George Blake, third in rank of the Elders.

"Where are you, David? Your people are filled with terror for your safety."

"In a cavern of my own making, to the west," said David Haslup. "I have devised a plan for the gradual subjugation of the Mongols, if I can only get back to Sanctuary to propound it. But there is a constant gnawing in my vitals which I cannot understand, and I have the feeling I have heard our old men complain of—feebleness, uncaringness, as though I, too, were an old man."

"That is easily remedied, once you reach us, or we are able to come to you,

David," said George Blake. "You need to be restored. Keep on coming. . . ."

"I can go no further! I am done."

"Then listen, David. Keep your televising turned in your palm. Concentrate on guiding us. I shall select a group of Sanctuarians, and we will come to you through the rocks—as your brother Frank went when he passed through to visit the Mongols."

"What of his ashes?" asked David.

"They have already been removed from the Black Columbarium, David," said George Blake, "and set in a niche of honor in the Columbarium of the Haslups."

"Good! Come to me, then, and with all speed!"

DAVID sat where he was, feeling sick and giddy, and with the gnawing in his stomach becoming a hellish thing. He knew that if he lost control of his senses—or whatever happened to people who lost consciousness—he would not be able to guide his people to him, along the beam of his televisor, and would be entombed forever in the rocks. He would be found in some future age, if ever at all—perhaps as a fossil, like an ancient group that rested in the rock of a column that upheld the roof of First Sanctuary, and which must have offered silent, rather ghastly welcome to the first people to enter Sanctuary, thirty nine generations ago.

He concentrated, then, on remaining conscious.

Hours passed as he fought the lack of air, the heat of the rocks, while body moisture drenched his tight-fitting garments of pliable bird's-eye porphyry.

Agas passed, or so it seemed, before he heard his people coming through the rocks. He retained consciousness until the huge head of Jan Schmidt appeared in a sudden opening west of where he sat. . . .

"Well, David," said Jan Schmidt, "I'd have answered when you called, but I was in First Sanctuary, examining the manner in which you closed it off, making sure you had left no clue by which the Mongols might find us. Not expecting a cry for help from you, I was not listening. I am sorry."

Then David Haslup did something which no Sanctuarian ever did. He fainted.

When he regained consciousness he was in his own Meditation Room, with The Chief Elders standing about him. He opened his eyes.

The gnawing was gone from his stomach. He stood, and was the man he had been when he had gone forth from Sanctuary.

Sanctuary, a vast Restoring Booth—as it had been for generations—had fed him, quenched his thirst, removed from his body the aches, pains and weaknesses of old age. He felt as though he had dreamed his hideous experience in the ageless rocks west of Sanctuary.

"My friends," he said softly, "here is the plan I have brought to you. If we, the Elders, are not lacking in courage and ingenuity, we can and will destroy or subjugate the Mongols—we the Elders of Sanctuary! And as we lay waste, or subjugate, a given section, we shall people it with our own race gradually, little by little, but as inevitably as that the sun which sinks into the Pacific Ocean at night will rise over the mountains in the morning!"

"By the Ashes of our Forefathers!" ejaculated Jan Schmidt. "What new oath is this you have learned in your absence from Sanctuary!"

"It is an oath, if you would call it that, Jan," said David, grinning, "which reflects, in subtle fashion, upon the almost divine intelligence of our people!"

VI

THE PLAN

THERE was a great deal of poring over the ancient maps in Sanctuary. Unfamiliar names flashed before the eyes of the interested Elders—place names. El Paso, Fort Worth, Dallas, Denver, Billings, Spokane, Minneapolis, New Orleans, Washington D. C. David Haslup, having investigated the west coast as far south as Los Angeles, as far north as ancient Portland, was able to lay out, with some degree of accuracy, a rough map of the ancient land of his forefathers, before the Mongols had conquered its people.

When he had done so, and estimated distances, Sanctuarians were aghast that their own subterranean land was so

meager in extent. Dropped in the midst of all that vastness it was nothing at all—except a hiding place. Yet the number of its inhabitants was greater than had been all their forefathers who had held the ancient land now in enemy hands.

"Nor is that all the tale, my friends," said David. "Not only is the ancient land thousands of miles broad, and thousands of miles long, with vast pools of water to the west of it to my knowledge—and to the east if these old maps are correct—but the rest of the outside is a globe set inside another globe of blue that is mightier than the mind of man can conceive. Vast we are, here; vaster by far is the ancient land; but vastest of all is *their* outside. Perhaps, when we have retaken our own from the Mongols, we will go after the problem of still further conquest. But it may take yet another thirty nine generations, for the task is a terrific one. For our time, however, it will be enough to regain our own."

"You speak of strange houses that travel on the face of the vast water pool," said George Blake. "What of them?"

"They are boats, of course," said David. "Obviously the Mongols do not need them, nor do they use them themselves. This is theory, only—for what use could they possibly have for such slow-traveling vehicles? However, they have conquered all the world, so I heard outside, and all the rest of the world is a subject people. So, the Mongols here forbid their subjects the use of their anti-gravity globes as a peace assurance. It confines possibly recalcitrant subjects to commerce, keeps them at peace by denying them the faster method of travel. For this reason only are slow-moving water-houses in use. That is my theory. Perhaps further investigation will prove the theory false, as," ruefully, "I have proved so many other of our theories false, including our own divinity!"

The Elders flushed. They were oddly like children who had discovered a new toy. And they were glad to have the mantle of divinity dropped from their shoulders. It was a grand and glorious thing to be able to be human beings, along with the rest of Sanetuarians.

"Now," said David, "for the plan. I

wish our scientists, while our enemies outside scour their cities and find us not, to bring us the gift of invisibility. It must be something vibratory, I suppose. And it must be light as the anti-gravity shoes we wear, as our disintegrators and magnets, and the balancing skull-caps on our heads, for it will be added to our equipment. When this is done, we shall talk again, for there may be yet more to the plan."

The invisibility-vibrator required little time. The scientists of Sanctuary were men of great intelligence and ingenuity. The first ones they turned out for test purposes, however, made their wearers desperately ill, and had to be rebuilt. This took little time, either.

And the day came when David Haslup had the rest of the plan ready. Again he called his Elders about him.

"This," he said, "is the plan. You, George, will give it in complete detail, to your fighting men. The same with you, Jan Schmidt. The same with the rest of you. Make sure that every last one of your subordinates knows exactly what it is. There must be a second in command, a third in command, even a fourth, in the event that their superiors die in our attempt to regain our own. Then you, George Blake, will go outside, and your area of operation will be in and around the ancient city of Seattle. You, Jan Schmidt, will go to El Paso, if you can find any of the ancient landmarks, and work eastward from there to the Mississippi, if it still exists. And you. . . ."

Thus, swiftly, having worked it all out in his head, David Haslup split the once-United States up among the twenty-five Elders, including himself. He took New York as his own, for there, in the long ago, had all the real activity and wealth of his people been gathered together. In all probability it also was the nerve-center of the Mongol nation which covered the ancient land.

"Make sure," was his last command, before the going forth, "that your televi-connection with your people is perfect. There must be no mistakes. As for restoration during our absence. . . ."

Jan Schmidt grinned. "I forgot to tell you that our method of restoration," he said, "being based on the vibratory principle, has been included in the invisibility-vibrator. In other words, it

will not be necessary for a Sanctuarian to return to Sanctuary to be fed and absorb the liquids his body needs. By a special attachment on his invisibility-vibrator, he absorbs from land and air, wherever he may be, the essentials to life. We go out, then, with no problem of supply to worry us."

"That's great, Jan," said David. "I confess I forgot all about my own recent experience, beyond possibility of instant and perpetual restoration."

"Trust me," said Jan Schmidt, "to look out for the ease and comfort of my innards!"

Jan's desire for constant restoration was a jest among his people. If he had been able to cozen the vast Restoration Booth which was Sanctuary, he would have been the fattest man who ever lived, probably. But in Sanctuary restoration—which meant artificial eating and drinking—was just as much as was needed, and no more.

THE Elders canvassed the entire situation and could find no flaw in it. Only the Elders themselves were to go forth at first. Equipped with invisibility-vibrators they could be seen only in case some accident happened to the vibrators. Haslup found himself able almost to feel sorry for the Mongols! After all, it wasn't *they* who had slaughtered their forefathers, but *their* distant ancestors. However, the time was ripe to move against them.

The Elders quitted Sanctuary that night, the seventh after David Haslup had returned from his strange visit to the west coast of the ancient land.

Outside Sanctuary, with the way closed behind them, stood the twenty-five Elders.

They scanned the skies for the globes of the enemy, and saw only the twinkling stars above the Rockies. Twenty-two of the Elders had not seen them before. Their gasps of breathless amazement delighted David. He told them about where they were located on their maps—tiny copies of which had been given to all Elders. Then . . .

"From this moment until we return here, which will be when I contact you, one by one, by televisi-ring," said David, "we keep our invisibility-vibrators operating unless absolutely sure we are under cover where even the keenest eyes

cannot see us. Now, Elders, turn on your vibrators. I shall stand as I am to check what happens. . . ."

Almost instantly the forms of the twenty-four other Elders began to grow dim. David, exultant, watched the miraculous metamorphosis. In three or four seconds he, apparently, stood alone in the valley under Chrome Mountain, far above Hell Roaring Creek.

"Jan Schmidt," he said audibly.

"Yes, David," came a voice apparently out of nothingness, with a chuckle in it, "I am still here! But I leave this very instant."

"Go!" said David.

"I am still here, David," said George Blake's voice, coming out of the ravine, "and ready to go."

"You can see me plainly, George?" asked David. "And all the rest of you?"

"Yes," said George Blake, his words followed by a chorus from the other Elders. "You look no differently than at any time I have known you. Excited perhaps, with your face flushed, but aside from that, nothing."

"Can any of you see any of the others?"

They reported that they could not. To each then, by name, David gave the brisk command: "Go!"

George Blake was away. David watched for the shape of him against the sky, and did not see him—nor did his shadow fit across and up the face of Chrome Mountain. He heard one man swear:

"By the Ashes, who jostles me?"

"You can be felt, if encountered by accident," said David, catching up the meaning of the oath, "so take care not to come too close to any enemy. If, by merest chance, someone were to grab one of you. . . ."

But he ceased talking, for he knew himself to be alone in the ravine that dived sharply down to Hell Roaring Creek.

David Haslup set his own invisibility-vibrator into motion. He felt no different than he had before, though he knew himself invisible. He turned as he stood on a boulder, seeking his shadow—and found it nowhere. The fact delighted him. He rose and swept swiftly down the ravine to Hell Roaring Creek, where the whim possessed him to lower himself

until he could touch the white-crested waters of the brawling Creek.

He could feel them, and they were cold. Save, then, that he could not be seen, he was a normal man, and the invisibility-vibrator did no harm to his bodily functions. Knowing this, and secure in his knowledge, David rose out of the valley of Hell Roaring Creek, and started east as fast as he could travel without too much effort. There was no hurry, really. His people had waited thirty-nine generations for this to happen; they could wait a bit longer.

He moved along just above the spires of the vast inland city, which reached north and south as far as he could see, and stretched endlessly eastward ahead of him. It was a beautiful thing, that city, but it held the millions of his enemies. And they were, he thought, helpless against him. He could not escape a feeling of compassion at thought of destroying them all.

MAYBE a way would be found to save human lives, after all. It was something to think about. That many must die was a foregone conclusion. Rulers were never willing to surrender until it was proved to them that their cause was hopeless, and this would not be until many of their people had died. David did not know this of his own experience, but reason told him so. He himself would not have surrendered Sanctuary even to the numberless Mongols, without a fight that would cost lives. The Sanctuarians themselves would not permit it. Nor, he supposed, when the time came, would the Mongols.

He moved on through the night. He reached the banks of the Father of Waters, the Mississippi, eastward of which the towers and spires of the great city began to rise higher into the sky. David could understand this at once. Here, since the time of the Conquest, had there been the greatest population—and the Mongols, when there had been no room for their people to spread out, had found room for them by building higher. The Eastern seaboard then would surely show him skyscrapers breathtaking in their heights.

Eagerly he speeded up, to see the fresh wonders he knew were coming. And near noon of the day after he left Sanctuary, he looked down on the Atlantic

Ocean from a gasping height—yet the spires of the great city almost touched his anti-gravity shoes. And, too, he looked into an amazing web of city. It was almost a solid block of city, caressing the very dome of the sky. In it countless millions of people must live. How could he contact them? His soul and heart revolted against needless destruction, and even as it did he knew that the same feeling of compassion must be coming to all the other Elders—that the thought of wholesale destruction must be repugnant to them. Besides, here, in the persons of the Mongols, were trade, profit, excitement . . . but the Mongols must have new rulers, and those must be the Elders of Sanctuary, and Sanctuarians themselves must be the new and accepted aristocracy.

"After all," thought David, "we'll better their condition, whatever it is. In the end they will thank us for conquering them!"

Even to David the thought was fantastic, even funny. A vast nation which now ruled the world, to be conquered by twenty-four invisible Sanctuarians! It was absurd.

David found an opening by which he could drop down into the valleys of what, in the long ago, had been the streets of Manhattan. He wished to see the Mongols close at hand.

Long before he reached the lowest level of the big city, he encountered a ramp along which traveled a steady flow of people in gay garments. There were men, women and children, closely packed together, apparently hurrying to and from their labors, or whatever their interests might be.

Boldly, knowing himself invisible, David dropped among them, thus violating a rule he himself had laid down—not to place himself within reach of the hands of his enemies. Someone jostled him. It was a girl, a lovely one—he supposed, by Mongol standards—and she whirled, a frown on her face, and said something sharply in her own language. Then her face became a mask of amazement, which David could well understand. There was nobody within ten feet of her except David, and him she could not see.

"Hello," said David casually, "how are you? And don't be frightened!"

The yellowish skin of the girl's face

went grayish white. She clutched at her throat with trembling hands. Of course she could not understand his words, but . . .

"Who are you?" she said hoarsely, "Who are you, to speak the long-dead language of those whom my people conquered?"

It was English, badly spoken, but understandable.

"I am one of them," said David, inspiration coming to him, "come back from the past to regain this land for our own. See to it that the word reaches your rulers!"

The girl screamed shrilly. Men and women turned, came to her. She was pointing at David, and for a moment he wondered if his vibrator had failed, if he were visible to her. But no, he cast no shadow. And he saw that those who gathered about the girl believed her daft.

"One moment, lady," said David, so that the others could hear, "and I shall give them proof of what you are, I suppose, telling them!"

He took a dreadful, desperate chance, and he knew it. He shut off the power in his invisibility-vibrator, and became visible to the Mongols. As he did so a great cry went up. There was a rush away from him in all directions, but eyes studied him as his enemies ran—and someone called out something, and the retreat halted. Then there was a general rush toward him—and David rose easily above their heads, hung there for a moment, and set his invisibility-vibrator going again. He could understand how his disappearance must shock the girl's witnesses, but at least he *had* furnished her with witnesses. Now, let them go spread their wild tale, and have some chance of being believed.

HE dropped low over the frightened girl. "I'll be back here in an hour, lady," he said, "to find out what the answer is. Tell your rulers that unless the answer is favorable, I shall destroy the first twenty buildings north of the southern tip of this island, where it marches out of the sea. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she said. "I shall take your message."

"In one hour I shall return to this same place. Take heed that none tries to capture me, for you yourself may die in the resulting struggle, and that I do

not wish to happen."

Then David rose into the sky, selected a spire from which he could look out across the Narrows, out to the blue bosom of the Atlantic, moved down it to a ledge, and sat down.

It surprised him not at all that the anti-gravity globes of the Mongols began rising in myriads from the city—to cluster thickly above the spot where he had given his fantastic message to a Mongol girl. One thing he knew he would not do: keep his rendezvous with that girl! For his keen brain had estimated the situation, and he knew that she would not be there.

To prove his deduction to himself, he slid off the ledge, sped to the south end of the city, dropped down to its webbing of ramps—and saw that the first twenty buildings were being swiftly emptied of their occupants. Then he knew he had the answer. At the exact moment when he had promised to speak again with the girl—the globes of the Mongols would destroy the whole area!

"Anyway," he thought, "they have her message, and they believe I can do what I say I can."

Another thought came to him. He sped back to the spot where the globes clustered so thickly. He went from one globe to another, taking his time, and peered into each. Long before the hour was up he saw what he had come to see—the girl to whom he had given his fantastic message! She was sitting in one of the globes, with grim-faced, bearded men around her, and she was weeping as though her heart would break.

"They don't believe her, but they are taking no chances," said David to himself. He throttled the urge to enter the globe in person, to reassure her. He could do that when the Mongols disclosed what they intended doing.

There were twenty minutes left of the hour mentioned in his ultimatum.

VII

WEIRD DESTRUCTION

DAVID HASLUP leaned negligently against the outside of the globe, waiting for the hour to pass. The girl stared down at the ramp where she had seen the strange

visitor, and David knew that she was frightened half out of her wits, wished he dared reassure her that he would allow nothing to happen to her. Hers was a dreadful responsibility. The Mongols would probably destroy her if they ever found out that her message was false.

The twenty minutes passed. The globes which clustered directly above the ramp—now empty of anything that lived—shot their beams down upon that ramp. It did not surprise David in the least that a great gaping pit appeared where the ramp had been. The disintegrators of the Mongols were efficient, too.

Had he been standing on that ramp, or anywhere near it, above or below it, he would be nothing now, not even dust—though how, being invisible, he could be less than he was, was difficult to understand.

The globes started moving southward, the faces of the men inside the one he followed growing grimmer with each passing moment. If those twenty buildings were destroyed as promised, it meant that the strange visitor to the Mongols had not been destroyed. If they were not . . . well, the girl was in a ghastly predicament. No matter what happened now, it was up to David Has-lup to make good on his ultimatum.

And the instant he started, he realized, the whole area of sky above those buildings would be criss-crossed by the destructive beams of the anti-gravity globes. He must make sure of his way of escape before he began the job of destruction.

He decided that there was one safe place—not inside the globe, for in there, if he used the disintegrator, he would destroy the anti-gravity globe itself.

So he dropped below the globe, when it became stationary above the section he had promised to destroy, and keeping contact with it with the top of his head, drew up his feet as far as he could—and brought his disintegrator into play. He licked his lips with anticipation of the havoc he would wreak. It would certainly give the Mongols something to think about.

He picked his first building, after carefully counting and marking in his mind the ones he had promised to destroy. Then he pressed the button on his disintegrator . . .

He played that grim, murderous muz-

zle carefully over the area. First, however, he cut off the spires of the twenty buildings indicated—and screams of abysmal terror rose from the city, a gargantuan crescendo of terrified sound that shook the very air.

DAVID whipped the muzzle back and forth across the truncated tops of those buildings, even as the spires were toppling down upon the deserted ramps. He sliced off the tops, one after the other, as a man might have knocked off the tops of wheat with a walking stick. And when he had whipped the muzzle across to the right, he whipped it back to the left again—each time across the remainder of those same twenty buildings—and the resulting roar mounted and mounted as the buildings toppled progressively, and were gradually turned into rubble where their foundations had been laid down.

David, his weird destruction ended, slid back up along the curve of the globe, and looked in.

The bearded men looked like statues. Their eyes were popping from their heads. They could not believe what they had seen. The girl had stopped weeping, and horror was on her face again. What would the Mongols do to her now that her story had been proved?

The globe was rocking in the currents of air sent up from the pit David's disintegrator had dug in Lower Manhattan. The occupants of the globe would scarcely notice the opening of their door. David took a desperate chance again, opening the door swiftly, closing it at once. The Mongols, however, sensed that something had happened, and whirled to look at him.

Had any of them guessed that an invisible man had entered their anti-gravity globe?

He tried to read the answer in their faces, but could not be sure. They all seemed to be listening. One of them walked across the globe to the door, fumbling with his hands like a blind man. David knew the man had guessed, and was trying to grasp him. The danger was terrific, he knew that. David evaded the fingers of the searcher by the merest hairbreadth. He slipped past the others, to stand behind the girl. He held his breath lest she hear him. She was of the enemy, yet he had the feeling that she

was interested in him, too—but never enough for him to be safe if she knew he were in the globe.

Now one of the Mongols approached the girl. His words were sing-song, grim, savage. The girl cowered back. David sucked in his stomach to keep the back of her head from touching him. The intention of the Mongol was plain. He thought the girl knew more than she had told. He was going to get it out of her or know the reason why.

He extended his two hands for her throat, and David was faced with a grim necessity. If he blasted down the Mongol, he would also disintegrate that part of the globe which was directly behind the man. And he could not see injury come to the girl by whom he had contacted the Mongols.

"Please," said the girl in English, "if you are here, let me know!"

The Mongol paused, his hands still extended toward the girl's throat. His attitude was one of listening.

"Yes," he said, also in English, "disclose your presence if you dare!"

David fought against the temptation to answer them in kind. He gathered from the fact that he had heard a man and woman speak English, that the language was taught in the schools of the Mongols—or else some of the ancient people from whom David was descended had been made prisoners, been allowed to linger on, and had kept the Mongols conversant with the tongue. One never knew for certain, what might happen in thirty-nine generations.

David touched the girl's head. Her hair was not as soft as the hair of Sanctuary women, but the touch delighted him—and the result of the touch was strange. The girl whirled, tried to throw her arms about him. But he had been watching for that. He slipped past her, past the outstretched arms of the Mongol who still threatened her, and to the control panel of the anti-gravity globe.

As he did so he turned, holding his disintegrator in his hand, and spoke to the occupants of the globe for the first time.

"Make a move in this direction and I shall destroy you all, as I just destroyed your buildings below us. It is no fault of the girl that I selected her as my contact with your rulers. It is fortunate for you that I saw fit to select any one. If anything happens to her I shall know it,

understand? For I am going to give her a token which, if she wears it, will keep her in constant touch with me—and I will know if anything happens to her. . . .

David had not foreseen this contingency, but had brought an extra televising with him, just in case something might happen to the one he habitually wore.

Now he took it from his garments, tossed it to the floor of the anti-gravity globe where, removed from the effect of his invisibility-vibrator, the ring became visible.

"Nobody touches it but the girl," he warned, keeping them covered. They stood, staring, their faces white—but whether from terror or unbelief he could not be sure. They heard the ring strike the floor of the globe. Their eyes turned upon it. They gasped.

"Take it, lady," said David to the girl, "and put it on the middle finger of your right hand!"

THE girl did not move. One of the Mongols stooped to pick it up for her. David snapped at him, and the man straightened up.

"I said," David's command to the girl was grim, "for you to pick up the ring!"

Hastily the girl obeyed, putting the ring on the finger he had designated.

"Turn the seal inside your palm," he continued, "and close your palm upon it whenever you wish to contact me. Simply think my name—which is David Haslup!"

"David Haslup!" yelled the Mongol man who spoke English. "The ancient leader of the people our forefathers destroyed to a man—but could never find! You could not be he!"

"I am the thirty-ninth of the name, in direct descent," said David; then, to the girl, "what is *your* name?"

"Ye Lan," said the Mongol leader, when the girl showed that she feared to answer, because to answer would mean to traffic with the enemy.

"Is that correct?" said David.

The girl nodded, almost imperceptibly. David slipped to the door, opened it and as outside on the instant. The Mongols charged the door, banged against it, but were too late. David knew that the beams of the globes would again play all through the sky, seeking him—so he slid

to the top of the globe and sat, patiently waiting for them to give it up as a bad job. As he did so he looked down, to see Ye Lan turning the ring over and over in her hand. When she had the seal in her palm, she closed her fingers over it—and David, grinning, instantly communicated with her.

"That's right, Ye Lan," he televised her. "Remember that always, when you are in danger."

The girl started, looked all about the globe's interior.

"No, I'm not inside," said David, "but I see you plainly, and you are lovely, even if you *are* scared, though my wife, Nala Zura, would give me the devil if she knew I were telling you so!"

The ghost of a smile touched the girl's lips. She kept her palm closed, and David continued.

"Once every twenty-four hours, in twenty-five different sections of your country, Ye Lan, five big buildings will be destroyed—until I receive word from you—all you have to do is think my name, when you wish to communicate, and hold the ring as you now do—that your chief ruler is willing to treat with me. I regret in advance the loss of life that such destruction will entail. In order to obviate that, I shall warn your rulers, through you, at exactly what places destruction will take place! Do you understand me?"

Her answer came. "I understand you. You are a hideous beast! If I knew where you were . . ."

"I was on top of your globe," said David, sliding away from his coign of vantage as he televised her, "but I'm not there now—and we'll meet again. Remember, three o'clock tomorrow afternoon, in twenty-five different places, throughout your nation, five buildings will be destroyed. Their locations will be given you later."

He was moving lazily out above The Narrows, in the general direction of south, when he finished his message to Ye Lan—so he did not see her jerk her head back to stare up at the roof of the anti-gravity globe.

He was enroute to ancient Washington, D.C., to contact Cleve Harcourt, the Sanctuarian Elder to whom that area had been assigned—and was already, by tele-vision, in communication with him.

There was still one great flaw in his

plan: he hadn't the slightest idea where to hunt for the headquarters of the ruler or rulers of—whatever this vast land was now called.

VIII

GITO COMMUNICATES

FROM Cleve Harcourt, whom David contacted in ancient Washington, D.C., he learned of a discovery that Harcourt had made. Harcourt was a man for queer details like that. The sun, said Harcourt, didn't shine on all the surface of the earth at the same time, so three o'clock in the afternoon in the east coast, was not three o'clock in the afternoon on the west coast. It was, instead, twelve o'clock, noon. That, David learned, he must take into consideration in his plans.

So, having discussed the matter briefly with Harcourt, David painstakingly televised each of his other twenty-three Elders, told each of them exactly when he must strike, and where. Having done this, he televised Ye Lan.

And now his time was right. Noon on the west coast, three in the afternoon on the east coast, one in the afternoon in the mountains which covered Sanctuary—at such proper times as he indicated, buildings would fall all over the country, struck down by the might of the "invaders," if His Majesty Gito did not make terms with David Haslup and his "horde."

The Mongols thought Haslup backed by invisible hordes, and he saw no reason to disabuse them of the belief. It was rather amusing than otherwise.

He televised Ye Lan when he had definitely got word back from each of his Elders where they intended to strike, and gave the exact locations to Ye Lan, so that she could pass the facts on through official channels, and prevent tremendous loss of life.

"And by the way, Ye Lan," he said, "what is the right name of this country of yours—soon to be returned to its rightful owners?"

"It's name is Mei Hua," she replied. "And you promise that none will be slain?"

"This first time the promise is given,

provided that no person is in any of the buildings designated. But if, after we have proved our power. His Majesty still sees fit to hold off making terms with us, I guarantee nothing, not even information as to where we will strike next."

Then he broke the mental connection with Ye Lan. She was all right, Ye Lan, for a Mongol. If it were not for Nala Zura. . . .

That reminded him of his wife, and he televised her to ask how things were going in Sanctuary. She was rather short and sharp with him, but refused to tell him why. She'd "listened in" on his conversations with Ye Lan, probably.

Came the next day, and at fifteen minutes before three o'clock, David Haslup was again above ancient New York City's site. And that city was almost blanketed by anti-gravity globes, especially over the spot where David was going to destroy buildings to prove that he could make good on his threat.

The area—though he could never have known that—was what had been known in his forefather's time as Times Square, and directly across town from the Hudson to the East River. And the anti-gravity globes were so thickly set above the area that it seemed almost impossible to do anything about them.

Were their pilots expecting him to strike from below or above? If from below, the second he did strike their beams would lance down at him. If from above, there was no way of telling just what they would do. Grimly, David Haslup set his teeth.

"You've asked for it," he thought. "I told you that nobody would die unless they hampered my activities. And those anti-gravity globes are occupied by the warriors of Mei Hua."

It would be fatal, of course, if their beams were on, and searching the sky above them—which they might well be if they were expecting attack from above—but that was a chance he had to take, and he took it without questioning the possibility of death for himself. He only hoped that Ye Lan was not in one of the doomed globes.

At the very last minute he decided even against going above the globes. Instead, from a point perhaps a mile above ancient Jersey City, he carefully gauged his distances. He aimed his disintegrator, and saw that the muzzle pointed at

the east bank of the Hudson—and that across its top he could see the drifting shapes of several anti-gravity globes.

That was unfortunate—for the globes and their occupants.

He pressed the button. The muffler clicked off. The globes in line, as he gently played the muzzle back and forth, and up and down, vanished like puffs of smoke—except that they left no trace whatever of globes or occupants. And below where they had hovered the buildings vanished, too—as did the solid rock under them for a depth he did not have a chance to see, because the waters of the Hudson went roaring into the gash before he could even be sure.

HE moved forward, fully expecting the beams of all globes to north and south to converge on him. Now would be a ghastly time for his invisibility-vibrator to go out of order, and show him standing there in the sky, a perfect target for countless death-dealing beams.

But nothing of the sort happened. He simply moved straight eastward, while under him the globes vanished, one by one, two by two, and below them the buildings disappeared, together with the foundations on which they had stood, for a depth he was never to know because it filled so swiftly with rushing waters—their roaring coming plainly up to him.

More globes went down.

More buildings were erased, more foundations. In a matter of seconds he had cut a swath through the middle of Ancient New York that effectually divided Manhattan Island almost in the middle. And in the deep gash, at water level, the waters of the two rivers, Hudson and East, mingled to form a black, sullen channel. How deep it was he did not know, would never know. Nor would he know for sure how many of the anti-gravity globes had been destroyed, nor how great the loss of life by those who had been passengers in them.

When he had completed his task, and the cries of despair of the Mongols were coming up to him, he televised Ye Lan.

For all of a minute there was no answer. His heart contracted, suffering a pang of terror lest she had been in one of the globes and had vanished under the deadly rays of his disintegrator.

But, shortly, she answered him.

"This is Ye Lan."

"This is David Haslup. . . ."

"Vile murderer!" said Ye Lan. "Ghastly beast! I cannot find the words with which to tell you how unspeakable your conduct has been."

"Ages ago your forefathers did all this to my forefathers, and more—much more. Their weapons could not possibly have been so deadly. Have you heard from my allies?"

"Yes. You have proved everything. Just as you said. But why was it necessary to destroy our globes?"

"I warned your people, through you, to keep away from that area. The occupants of the globes did not, so I had no choice. And were they not there for the sole purpose of destroying me?"

"Yes. Yes . . . but . . ."

"Then, there is no time for sentimentality. They came to slay, and were slain, as they all knew they might be. I am happy only that you were not, this time, a passenger in one of the globes."

"With all my heart I wish I had been. Then this horror would be over for me."

David Haslup refused to recognize the despair in her tele-thought. He still had a job to do. It must be done. His Elders had done their duty, as he had done his.

"Ye Lan?" he said again.

For all of a minute there was no answer. Then came her reply.

"Yes, it is Ye Lan."

"Get this message to your emperor, Gito. Two hours hence, exactly—kindly note the time to send to His Majesty—if His Majesty does not, through you, communicate with me, I shall destroy all of your city that rests upon the island I have just cut in two. I shall leave nothing upon it, nor alive within it—and water shall sprawl across where it was. Make this plain to him, for I have nothing further to say."

"And if I am one of the doomed?"

"You are an enemy, Ye Lan," he snapped. "Forget that you happen also to be a lovely woman!"

And then he went away, wondering if he would have the heart, at shortly after five o'clock, to carry out his threat—knowing even as he asked himself the question that he would, that he *had* to do it.

WITHIN fifteen minutes of "zero hour," he received a frantic message from Ye Lan.

"His Majesty will discuss the matter with you, if you will hold your fire. He will rise in the Imperial Globe. . . ."

"Where? And how shall I know it?"

"It will flash out from the south end of Manhattan Island, over the water to The Narrows. . . ."

"How shall I know it?"

"It carries the imperial color throughout—yellow!"

"There must be none in it except His Majesty, if he flies the globe, none but his pilot if he does not fly. . . ."

"There is nothing His Majesty does not do!" retorted Ye Lan indignantly.

"I will meet His Majesty. But make this clear to him. If there is a trap, let His Majesty understand that he himself will be caught in it. My hordes know all I have said, for they have heard every word. Many of them will be close to me when I meet with His Majesty. If anything happens to me they will know it. And if the yellow globe carries a decoy Emperor, may the gods have mercy on Mei Hua! For if that means death to me, I shall send word to my people to leave not one stone of Mei Hua standing upon another!"

"His Majesty expected you to use all those safeguards. There will be none in the globe but His Majesty. There will be no tricks."

David agreed. He sped across the East River, then swung south, keeping a keen watch for the yellow globe. He saw no other globes rising anywhere, unless they, like the Elders of Sanctuary, were invisible, which he did not believe possible—else the globes over the middle of the city would have been invisible, too.

A single globe, larger by far than any he had ever seen, looking like a great sun because its color was imperial yellow, rose from the south end of the island, set a course for the open sea. Maybe His Majesty was going to attempt to sacrifice himself for the good of his people. Maybe . . .

"Are you closing in, Harcourt?"

David televised the Elder southward.

"I am close enough to spit on the yellow globe, David," said Harcourt. "I lost no time whatever!"

"Good! And who else?"

"Martin and Glover. We'll cover you."

Ye Lan probably got those messages,

and knew that only three men were on guard over Haslup, but since Haslup, alone, had done so much damage to the city, the potentialities of three were cataclysmic to contemplate.

David hurried after the yellow globe, which swung up to a mile above the water and hung suspended in space. David closed on it, fully expecting to move into a rain of invisible disintegrating rays; but that didn't happen. David peered through the walls of the globe. He saw an old man, with proud, black eyes, sitting alone on a throne, within easy reach of the globe's instrument panel. He looked dejected, filled with despair. That he had been through a ghastly experience was visible on his face; that he was agreeing to a truce now proved how horrible must have been the experiences of the Mongols under the disintegrator rays of Haslup and his brethren.

David found the door, opened it swiftly, set foot in the Imperial Globe. Gito looked toward the door, his eyes dull.

He said nothing. David, having come so far, went the whole way. He stopped his invisibility-vibrator—and Emperor Gito's eyes played, with no little surprise, over the healthy, athletic figure of David Haslup.

"I am David Haslup, Your Majesty," said David.

"I am Gito," said the Emperor. "It seems incredible that one man. . . ."

"Many men, Your Majesty," said David quietly, "are at my back, if you could only see them—many men who hunger for the homes their forefathers lost."

"What," said Gito, "do you want? If you wish my empire. . . ."

"It will, Your Majesty," said David Haslup, smiling, "be far less than that. You may even be delighted with the terms I am going to propose!"

IX

AMITY

THE Mongol Emperor waited. Obviously he resented Haslup's easy assumption not only of equality, but of superiority. It must have galled his soul, coming as he did from a

long line of invincible conquerors. But the Sanctuarians had proved their ability to destroy—and ability to destroy was something the Mongols understood and appreciated because their nation was founded on such ability.

"What are your terms?" said the Emperor. "They must be reasonable, or I shall refuse them, even though it cost the lives of us all."

"What good would it do us to slay all of you, Sire?" asked David. "The ancient hatreds have been dead for generations. Let them moulder in the dust of the dead centuries, where they belong. I know nothing of them, nor does Your Majesty."

"Forget the fine words. What are your terms?"

"Freedom of action, throughout Mei Hua, for my people. They will become the aristocracy of Mei Hua. I shall rule equally with you, though the rule shall appear to be through you. . . ."

A light of cunning was coming into the eyes of Gito.

"Where are your people, Haslup?" he asked.

David smiled. "I shall not tell you just yet. Not, understand, that I am afraid of treachery, because even if all but a dozen of us lose our lives, we shall still overmatch you in war, because of our scientific secrets. . . ."

"And these secrets, by which you fly without wings, by which you become invisible, are we to share them with you?"

"Only, Sire, if we prove ourselves able to live in reasonably friendly relations for twenty-five years. By that time, surely, we shall understand one another. Then the secrets will be shared."

"Where are your people?" insisted Gito. "How many of them are there?"

David Haslup pondered the questions for a moment, wondering wherein a trap might lie.

Then he plunged. "They live in Sanctuary, under the Rocky Mountains, whence they were driven by your people in the long ago. Their number is three million!"

A tight smile came to the lips of the Mongol Emperor.

"Now that we know where they are, and their numbers, which total one one-thousandth of ours, I must refuse your terms! Do what you like. Even if I die, here and now, your people will be hunted

down and destroyed, one by one. . . ."

"Take it easy, Sire," said David, smiling. "I appreciate a fighter's last gasp, and this is yours—and you know it. I shall make it easy for you to find us. I shall send word to my people to come forth, to scatter all through Mei Hua, selecting the spots where they wish to live and make their homes. Those spots shall be given them by Imperial Decree, issued by yourself, and the people thereabouts shall be their subjects. I will, however, instruct my people that they rule with justice, mercy, and understanding. . . ."

"Yes," said Gito, "tell them to come forth. My people will destroy them like vermin!"

"And while this is going on," said David, "I shall stay beside Your Majesty. Surrounding us will be such of your nobles as you may select, and they will be visible to us both. But there will be others—my Elders, invisible always. They will see every move we all make, and one false move on your part, or that of any of your nobles, or one death brought about deliberately among my people, by your people, and you and all your family will die!"

Emperor Gito sat silent for several minutes before he spoke again. A wise submissiveness invaded his manner and his tone.

"You drive a hard bargain, my friend," he said at last. "How do you propose to work out the details?"

"Simply. You go with me now, or rather I go with you, to Sanctuary. You will instruct your nobles to follow us there. I shall then take you into Sanctuary with me, where you may see everything—but none will know where you are until my terms have been complied with."

"In any case I shall see this Sanctuary, into which my forefathers drove yours?"

"Yes."

"That much, anyhow, I wish to do. Let us go, speedily!"

"Notify such nobles as you wish to join you, to meet us at a spot I shall tell you. And understand that, technically, you are a prisoner until the terms are fulfilled."

Gito nodded. He manipulated his own televisor, spoke in to it in sing-song Mongolese.

HE turned away, nodded. The yellow globe was flung into the high heavens, until all the city below became a garden of tiny spires, and hurtled into the west. Four hours later it sank down in the ravine above Hell Roaring Creek—and after it sank twelve other anti-gravity globes, filled with Gito's nobles.

"No tricks, Sire," said David, "or every Mongol in the ravine dies on the instant."

There were no tricks. David opened up the door of Sanctuary with his magnet, watched the Mongols file past him into the cavern, closed the way behind them. They were now at the mercy of Sanctuary.

David Haslup led the way into the perfect cavern-city, and Sanctuarians gathered about them as they went, exclaiming in awe at the Mongols, welcoming David back with cries of delight.

"Wait, Sire," said David, "until you are equipped with anti-gravity shoes. It will be easier than to go through our cavern-city."

Terror smote the Mongols at first, when David urged them to step off into space, trusting to their anti-gravity shoes and their balancing skull-caps. But when they found it to be safe they were like children with new toys.

When they had seen all of Sanctuary they wished, Gito said to David Haslup.

"We agree to your terms, Haslup, on one condition."

"And that, Sire?"

"That Sanctuary be given to us as a haven of refuge from the cares of state, a place to which we may come for our personal privacy—and that the secrets of the anti-gravity shoes and skull-caps be not given to my people."

David grinned. "I thought Your Majesty would not be able to resist the beauty of this place. One stipulation: it shall be the holy place of my people, to which they may come when they wish—though never when Your Majesty is in residence."

"Done, Haslup!"

"Good! Then all of us come into our own, immediately. I shall televise the news to my people. Make yourselves at home in Sanctuary until everything is ready. First, of course, I must contact my wife, Nala Zura."

David went into his Meditation Room, and televised his wife.

"Darling," he said, "I have the greatest news ever to be given Sanctuary. Our victory has been great, far-reaching, almost bloodless. . . ."

"I'm coming to you, at once," said his wife.

"But listen! I want to tell you, before you get here. . . ."

"Listen to me, David Haslup, I want to look you right in the face when I ask you a simple question!"

"Why of course, darling, come ahead.

And what is the question?"

She didn't answer. She appeared shortly in his Meditation Room, and this was her first question:

"David Haslup, tell me, is Ye Lan beautiful?"

Woman's natural question, from time immemorial, to which David, being a normal man, answered as casually as he could:

"Really, darling, I wasn't interested enough to notice!"

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INTERESTING SCIENCE NOTES

Stars that Burst: Novæ and Super-Novæ

ASTRONOMERS now believe that there are two distinct classes of novæ, or stars that burst. The normal and much more common type is about 25,000 times the brightness of the sun, and the other type, of which the Andromeda nebula nova of 1885 is an example, averages 40,000,000 times as bright as the sun.

It has been estimated that the ordinary nova occurs in a system such as our own Milky Way perhaps thirty times annually, but the super-nova appears about once in several centuries.

Records of new stars lend support to the theory that only one in our own stellar system within historical times, Tycho Brahe's nova of 1572, which was brighter than Venus and visible to the naked eye in daytime, was a super-nova.

Also it is now suggested that super-novæ possibly originate from giant stars and the ordinary novæ from dwarf stars, the greater number of the dwarfs accounting for the greater frequency of the smaller novæ.

The Brain as a Chemical Engine

THE latest researches in the chemistry of the brain show that to separate "mental" from "physiological" aspects of the brain is no longer possible. What the psychologist investigates and what the neurologist, the brain physiologist and chemist investigates merge together.

Examples are plenty. The poisonous gas discharged daily into the atmosphere by modern cars and other sources, known as carbon monoxide, produces "lesions" (injuries) in the brain. And these are accompanied by "psychic disturbances," by production of crazy ideas.

Everyone knows that ether, chloroform or any other anæsthetic drug stops thought processes or alters them profoundly. In the same way alcohol and caffeine (the active principle of coffee) excite the mind and often sharpen the wits. The drug mescaline can produce optical illusions and hallucinations of the most bizarre type.

Another fact of distinctly chemical nature is the reaction time involved in sense impressions. When light, sound, smell, heat or cold or irritation reach the body, a certain time elapses before we are aware of, and react to the stimulus.

Three-Speed Rocket for Sky Study

A SCHEME for shooting an exploratory rocket 967 miles above the earth to obtain meteorological information was recently put forward by two scientists of the California Institute of Technology—Frank L. Malina and A. M. O. Smith. Whether their rocket worked or not would depend upon its efficiency and "motor."

A rocket "motor" generally consists of a combustion chamber where fuel is ignited, transformed into gas, and shot through a nozzle to provide propulsive force.

Studies made by the Californian physicists indicated that if a motor of high efficiency could be built, far greater altitudes could be reached than ever before. Their rocket would be constructed in three parts, one within the other, to be exploded successively.

The rocket would be launched from a mountain-top so that fuel would be saved while the rocket moved through the denser lower atmosphere of the earth. Afterward it would "coast" through the upper thin air.

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THE DEAD SPOT

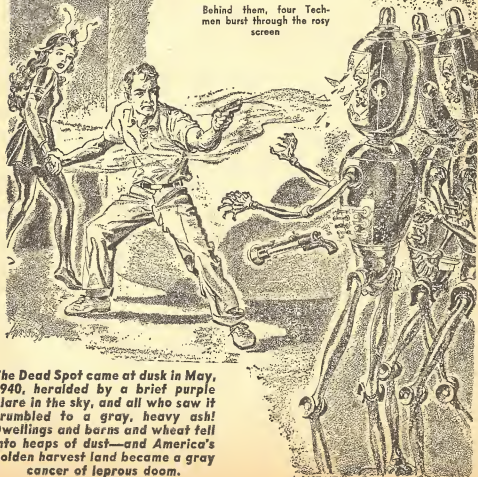
by JACK WILLIAMSON

THE DEAD SPOT came on May 8, 1940. One day the land had been golden with the harvest of wheat. The next, in a circle that covered ten thousand square miles of Kansas and Nebraska, there was only death.

It happened at dusk. A brief purple glare lit the sky. All who had seen it felt a burning of the skin, a leaden ache in the bones, a torturing thirst. And they died—hideously.

Medical skill was useless; doctors fell with the rest. The corpses crumbled to a gray, heavy ash, that no wind could stir. Dwellings and barns and wheat, rotted by the incredible decay that attacked all organic matter, fell to heaps of dust. It was curiously luminous by night, and the sun rose upon a flat gray

Behind them, four Technomen burst through the rosy screen



The Dead Spot came at dusk in May, 1940, heralded by a brief purple glare in the sky, and all who saw it crumbled to a gray, heavy ash! Dwellings and barns and wheat fell into heaps of dust—and America's golden harvest land became a gray cancer of leprous doom.

waste of leprous doom.

Its edge was queerly sharp. And all who ventured beyond the barrier, even planes flying high above, instantly fell. The whole world was appalled by this inexplicable cancer on the planet that televue reporters named the Dead Spot. What had happened? What if it happened again? Seeking an answer to those harrowing questions, the President called Congress into emergency session.

No relief was needed, for no survivors had come from the murdered land. Science failed to explain what had desolated it. The perplexed legislators ended by creating the Special Secret Service.

Seeking a chief for the SSS, the President sent for a man who had been on the bottom of the Pacific on the catastrophic night. Ryeland Ames, then only twenty-five, was already twice famous for daring deep-sea explorations in the *benthosphere* of his own design, and for startling success in smashing the atom with his own *super-cyclotron*.

A tanned, rugged six-footer, with stiff, tangled red hair and level blue eyes, Ames walked into the executive office and listened soberly.

"I'll do anything I can, Mr. President," he said. "But there are older men than I am, better trained. Rathbone, for instance, is the best radiation physicist in the world."

"Rathbone is in the hospital," said the President, "not expected to recover. He was injured in an experiment that went wrong." His eyes leapt back to the lean scientist-explorer. "No, you're the man for the job, Ames. The Dead Spot swallowed two hundred thousand people. If the thing happens again, it may take two million—or the whole world, for all we know! Your job is to find what it is, and stop it."

"Thank you, Mr. President," said Ryeland Ames. "I'll do my best."

AND Ames did it. The SSS was completely organized within a week, with five hundred men recruited from police and federal investigation departments. He set a guard about the Dead Spot, surrounded it with a ten-foot steel fence to keep out the unwary, and gathered a staff of scientists to study every angle of the disaster.

He even got Dr. Gresham Rathbone. The physicist was dying in the hospital

of an incurable heart trouble, aggravated by his injuries. Ames built him a new heart!

This novel blood-pump utilized the principles of Lindbergh and Carrel. It was a tiny, compact instrument, anchored in the chest cavity, its platinum tubes ingeniously sutured to the great veins and arteries. The nerves, from the cardiac plexuses, controlled it through inductive contact with a minute electro-magnetic relay.

Its most remarkable feature, however, was its motive power. A trace of hydrogen from water vapor, transmuted into helium through a secret process Ames had discovered in his super-cyclotron experiments, provided exhaustless energy. This "iron heart," Ames promised, would run a hundred years. It was only necessary for Rathbone to take weekly injections of the pale-green liquid catalyst that activated the atomic reaction.

On his feet in a few weeks, Rathbone joined Ames' scientific staff. He was a tall man, hawk-faced, with thick grizzled hair and sharp, deep-set frosty blue eyes, still pale and irritable from his illness.

"I've drawn a map of the Dead Spot," Ames told him, when he reported to the headquarters tent. "The center of the circle was the town of Freedom." His level eyes searched Rathbone's bleak, seamed face. "And we have discovered that that is where you were injured. I want to know what you were doing there, Rathbone."

His hollow eyes smoldered with a savage bitterness.

"I'd be dead, but for you," Rathbone said. "And I'll do anything I can." His lean fingers closed like claws. "The man who injured me was Dr. Clyburn Hope!" he gasped hoarsely. "And it was Hope who made the Dead Spot!"

Ames started. "Tell me," he whispered. "What happened?"

"Hope had an uncanny genius," rasped Rathbone's nasal voice. "He was the best biophysicist in America. He was working at Freedom. By inducing mutations and growing artificial cells, he was creating new species."

"New species?" Ames gasped.

Rathbone's sunken eyes flared again. "That's it—he wasn't satisfied with the present human race. That's where we quarreled!" His hands relaxed. "Mutations have been caused most suc-

cessfully by transforming the genes of cell-chromosomes with various rays," he explained. "And Hope called on me to work with him, because I had specialized in radiations."

Ames leaned forward, listening.

"Evolution," Rathbone went on, "has been a haphazard advance, made possible by the bombardment of the germ plasm with cosmic rays and their secondary radiations. Such men as Muller, with his fruit fly experiments, have accelerated evolution many thousands of times by making use of X- or radium rays. But Hope found something better yet—the *sigma*-field.

"That is a special space warp analogously related to the magnetic field. Its significant peculiarity is that it makes nearly all atoms above neon unstable, radioactive. The *sigma*-field speeds evolution to the limit imposed by actual destruction of the germ cells!

"With that, and his technique of building synthetic life-cells through combination of the great protein molecules, Hope set out to create a new race, to replace humanity!"

His claws of hands had knotted again.

"That's why we quarreled. For I knew that his new race must be enemies of the old." He caught a gasping breath. "We—we fought in the laboratory. He injured me—fatally, but for your skill, Ames.

"And his *sigma*-field is what made the Dead Spot!"

"Eh!" Ames stared at him, at last nodded. "I see," he murmured. "The radioactivity destroys normal life—could it be to make room for his new beings?" He stood up, eagerly. "Can you neutralize the field?"

"No." Rathbone shook his head. "Hope treated me like a mechanic. I designed equipment to his order, but he was very secretive about his theories and discoveries. Of course, however, my skill is at your service."

"Thanks, Doctor," Ames said. "We need you. If you can crack the Dead Spot—"

AND gaunt Gresham Rathbone became head of the great new SSS laboratory beside the desolated circle. Millions of dollars were poured into it. He and Ames and a hundred others worked there, desperately. A dozen lives were

lost, by hideous cancer-like radiation-burns. But the secret of the *sigma*-field eluded all search.

And the Dead Lands remained unconquerably—deadly.

A series of strange deaths, however, three years later, in metallurgical refineries, the Fort Knox depository, and the Bank of England, led to investigation by the SSS. All the victims had died of radiation-burns. And Ames' men found millions of dollars in gold, silver, and platinum, that showed a diminishing temporary radioactivity. The source could not be traced, but Ames suggested a theory.

"Transmutation could be going on, in the 'Dead Spot,'" he told Rathbone. "Precious heavy metals, under that radiation, building up out of light elements. If it were possible for men to enter and depart alive—"

"Men," broke in Rathbone solemnly, "or the synthetic beings of Dr. Hope!"

And other years went by. Ryeland Ames remained in charge of the SSS. His haggard face grew grim. His blue eyes took on a haunted look. For months of each year he lived in an observation balloon moored near the wall of death, studying its radiation with electrometers, spectroscopes, and Geiger counter tubes. Terrible burns sent him three times to the hospital. His bleak face was dark-tanned, scarred.

He became grimly close-mouthed, even with Rathbone. Few had seen the photograph always in his wallet. Its background was the flat desolation of the Dead Lands. It showed the tiny, distant figure of a woman, flying high over that weird plain—apparently on white frail wings. But he answered no questions about the picture's original.

The Dead Spot, late in 1950, began to grow!

Like a gray cancer on the Earth, it spread. The fence was swallowed up. Vegetation and buildings fell to heavy, unstirring dust. Few lives were lost, for Ames superintended the evacuation of doomed towns and farms ahead of the slow, inexorable advance. But no effort could check it.

The Dead Lands had already touched the Missouri. Its waters now absorbed more and more of the deadly energy. It became a river of terrible death, weirdly luminous by night. All the abandoned

cities below crumbled to the dust of death: Kansas City, St. Louis, Memphis, New Orleans.

Two years later, in a rude little camp that would have to be abandoned on the morrow, Ames told Rathbone that he was going into the Dead Spot.

"But you can't do that!" Stern lines formed around the long mouth of Rathbone, and gray fear shadowed his hollow eyes. "It would be—death."

"I've got to," Ames said flatly. "The Dead Spot has got to be stopped. From its rate of spread, you can figure the life of any city, or the life of the world. And that isn't very long."

"A dozen SSS men have gone in," Rathbone objected. "With every protection we could devise. And not one came out. Life simply can't exist, in the Dead Spot."

"But it does. I've seen it—photographed it."

And Ames displayed the picture in his wallet. Frowning, doubtful, Rathbone studied it silently.

"Snapped it out of the balloon, with telephoto lens." The haunted eyes and the deep voice of Ames had softened. "I had seen her before, with binoculars—half a dozen times in the last three years. And—well—I've dreamed of her."

The gaunt scientist made a harsh snorting sound, and a deep flush spread over the tanned face of Ames.

"I'm just telling you, Rathbone," he said grimly. "I'm not explaining it, because I can't. But, three different times in the balloon, when I was half dead with fatigue, I thought—or dreamed—that she was speaking to me. She's winged, really. Her name's Arthedne. She's in some desperate trouble. And she knows a lot about all this mystery. If I could find her—"

RATHBONE snorted again.

"Anyhow, I'm going." Ames reached swiftly for the photograph. "I've got the outfit designed—a few new additions of my own. I want you to check my plans—"

"I tell you," Rathbone insisted, "life can't exist—"

"It does!" Ames rapped. "What's more, there is a regular traffic, in and out. Our detectors have picked up rocket planes, flying too high to trail. And there's more poisoned metal on the

market! It has been doctored to neutralize the radiation, but there's still enough to prove it came out of the Dead Spot!"

A queer-looking plane, a month later, stood on a field near the advancing border of the Dead Lands. It was squat, stubby, gray with a special lead paint. The streamlines of its fuselage covered a four-foot globe that contained a layer of water between double walls of lead alloy.

Beside the machine, Ryeland Ames stood swaying in a bulky suit of lead cloth, so heavy that even his powerful frame could hardly support it. His blue eyes peered through immense lenses of leaded glass. A heavy automatic was strapped to his belt, balanced by two bright cylinders of steel.

"The lead will absorb part of the rays," he told eager televue reporters. "Magnetic screens will deflect a few more. The hydrogen atoms in the water will catch a few neutrons. Protection isn't perfect. But I hope to see the middle of the Dead Spot, and come back alive."

He started clambering awkwardly into the big lead ball.

A reporter demanded, "Those cylinders—"

"Atomic bombs," grunted Ames. "Stable triatomic hydrogen, under high pressure. My catalytic process will convert it instantly into helium—and enough free energy to level half a city."

The heavy door was screwed into place. A periscope peered back and forth. The plane roared clumsily across the field, took off heavily. Watchers held their breath, as it flew into the unseen barrier. But it didn't fall. It drove on, straight into the desolate heart of the Dead Lands. It diminished to a speck, and vanished beneath the gray horizon.

But the deep voice of Ames boomed a report through the short wave communicator:

"Following a faint streak that must have been a highway. Below is a rectangular pattern in the dust. Must have been a town. . . ."

Silence again, whispering static.

"Oxygen valve stuck!" It was half an hour later, Ames' voice was fainter. "Had to open port to breath. Can't understand failure—tested valve this morning. . . ."

"Cramped and aching. Skin begin-

ing to tingle. Rays getting to me, all right. But may have time. . . ."

Another humming pause.

"Something ahead. . . ."

"Buildings! Green smoke puffing from a tall stack. A long gray dump, and big shovels digging. Looks like a mine!—And a field, with long rocket planes standing on it! Must be where the transmuted metal . . ."

Ten strained, whispering minutes.

"Engine heating." The voice was hoarse, taut. "Missing—Gasoline disintegrating, perhaps—but, *there!*" It was a gasp of incredulous wonder. "There—it's a city! . . ."

"Yes, a city in the middle of the Dead Spot. Metal towers. Stacks pouring out green smoke. And machines—such huge machines! But I've got to turn back. Radiation getting me. . . ."

A longer silence, then the final whisper:

"Never make it. Motor cutting out. Missouri in sight ahead. Something—a queer flicker on the bluffs! And I see something moving—looks like a metal giant!—Well, Rathbone, you told me so! But carry on! The SSS must stop the Dead Spot!"

The faint voice ceased abruptly. The whirl and crackle of the strange energies of the Dead Lands was the only farther sound from the receiver. Night fell, and the forbidden circle turned weirdly luminous again.

PRESSING both hands against his throbbing head, Ryeland Ames tried to sit up. His head bumped something. Then he remembered. The crash had stunned him. He was still in the leaden ball.

His skin was feverish, stinging. A dull ache gnawed at his bones. Thirst tortured him. He wanted to drink the water seeping through the fractured inner wall, but he knew that absorbed radiations had turned it to liquid death—

The dusty, crumbling death of the Dead Spot.

Clumsy in the heavy suit, he opened the little door. It was dusk. The flat waste already glowed with its eerie, sullen luminosity. The bluff beyond the Missouri shone darkly, and the river was a lazy serpent of lambent doom.

There he had seen what looked like a metal giant. Now, riverward, he caught

a fugitive gleam. Was it the same metal thing, skulking cautiously up the dry ravine, stalking him? And what was it? Man, or some weird creation of Clyburn Hope?

He scrambled stiffly out of the sphere, felt with lead-gloved hands for the automatic and the two atomic bombs. Leaving the smashed, already glowing and crumbling wreckage of the plane, he struck out upriver.

"Checking out, sure," he muttered. "But first I'll find out one more answer."

For it was upriver that he had seen the flicker on the bluff.

Strange journey. He tramped through piles of heavy dust that burned with cold violet, green, purple, yellow. He waded depressions filled with luminous gas that seared his lungs like flame. Stumbled. Rose heavily. Fell again.

The ache grew swiftly in his bones. His body was on fire. Thirst was a shrieking agony. . . . Once he looked back, saw a moving glint. Was the thing following? It didn't matter much. He was crawling, now.

Then, when all seemed hopeless, she came to meet him.

Arthedne—the bright being of the picture and the dreams. She soared above the dark bluffs, glided down toward him on wings of gorgeous flame. The bright pinions didn't beat, but there was a pulse of color in them, of gold and rose, mauve and saffron.

Ames dragged himself to his knees, waved. And she dropped lightly on the shining dust before him. Her wings were suddenly gone! Two tall slender things, like antennae, curved upward from her shoulders. The wings had been aflame between them.

"Ames!" Her voice was silver melody. "You have come!"

She walked quickly to him. She was tall and slim and beautiful. A tunic of woven silver clung to the curves of her body. A jeweled star gleamed from the shining band that held her golden hair.

"Arthedne!" he choked. "You—?"

She was real, all human. Even the delicate lifted threads of her color-pulsing antennae were natural, beautiful. They were necessary as her arms. She would have been disfigured without them.

A faintness came over him. He grit-

ted teeth against the pain.

"My darling," he whispered. "I've seen you—flying. So beautiful. I've wanted—hoped—to come!"

He swayed. Her quick hands caught him.

"Ames! I perceived you, beyond the New Lands!" Her strong arms supported him. "In you alone I felt kinship to my own lost race, whom the Tech-men murdered. So I called to you. But Ames!" She shuddered with alarm. "You are ill!"

He whispered, "Dying."

"Not yet, Ames—for I brought you this!" She produced a small metal bottle, poured its screw-cap full of a pale blue liquid. "You are like Dr. Hope—of the old life, that cannot endure the rays of the New Lands. Drink this! It is the neutralization formula that kept him alive."

Ames swallowed it, and felt a swift recovery. In a few minutes he was able to rise from his knees. He remembered the skulking follower, looked apprehensively back.

"I saw the Tech-men." Her voice was a quiver of dread. "They are hunting tonight. But perhaps we can find Futuron. They have never found that, beyond its *tau*-field screen."

HER eyes were dark with grief and dread.

"Futuron was the last city the *neozoans*—my people—built," she said. "When the war-rays of the Tech-men destroyed all the rest, they ceased to strive, and bore no more children to live in the world of despair. I am now the last *neozoan*—and still the Tech-men hunt."

"But come!"

Ames stumbled heavily on again, beside her. They came to the bluff where he had seen that puzzling flicker. It was a jutting salient thrust out into the shining, poisoned Missouri. Excitement and fear sent shimmers of color along Arthedne's fine antennae.

"Where—?" Ames was gasping.

He stopped, rubbed his eyes. He had heard a faint humming. And now the Dead Lands were gone. They had come under a vast dome of roseate light. Before him rose graceful colonnades, and the white towers of spacious temple-like buildings.

"This is Futuron," she whispered.

"But I didn't see it!" protested Ames, bewildered. "And this pink light—"

"The city is invisible—almost," explained Arthedne. "That is our only defense from the Tech-men. The *tau*-field, an adaptation of Dr. Hope's *sigma*-field, deflects light around it. The rosy light is a fortunate incidental effect. Otherwise, since no light enters save through the spy-ports, we should be in darkness."

Delicate flowers, strange bright-hued blooms of varieties Ames had never seen, splashed pleasing color everywhere. He caught an exotic perfume. Arthedne led him to the simple, silent apartments where she dwelt.

"All this city?" Ames asked, trying to repress a shudder of awed wonder, "has lived and died since the Dead Spot came?"

"Time moves faster, in the *sigma*-field," she told him. "Twelve of my people fled with Dr. Hope to found the first *neozoan* city. I was born of the fourth generation."

They sat on a couch in a rose-lit pavilion. Ames turned intently to face her.

"The Tech-men?" he questioned.

"Dr. Hope created them?"

"Them, and the *neozoans* also," whispered the girl. "He sought to fashion a new race, more gifted than the old. There were many errors, failures. The Tech-men were the first that gave promise. They had large brains, inadequate bodies that had to be supplemented with intricate mechanisms. He kept them under observation in the laboratory compound."

"Meantime, however, another experiment brought forth the *neozoans*. We had a balance of physical and mental beings, so that we were largely independent of machines. We had new senses, new capacities, that the Tech-men lacked."

"Dr. Hope chose to let us live—as a small colony, that might exist at peace with the old race. And he planned to destroy the Tech-men, for he was alarmed by a strain of atavistic ruthlessness that had appeared in them."

"All his creations were adapted to life in the *sigma*-field, and for that very reason unable to survive outside it. Dr. Hope planned merely to reverse the field in the quarters of the Tech-men."

"They had keen brains, however, and the desire to survive. They suspected Dr. Hope. Under the leadership of a mu-

tant born with an aggressive will to power, they revolted, seized all the laboratory, and expanded the *sigma*-field to cover a vast space."

"I see!" whispered Ames. "That was when the Dead Lands came!"

"To us, the New Lands," murmured the strange girl beside him. "The rebel leader, the Tech-Czar, attempted to kill Dr. Hope and all the *neozoans*," she went on. "But they escaped, to found our first city. And the Tech-men, remaining, built Technopolis—"

"Technopolis!" gasped Ames. "The city I saw, under a pall of green?"

"That city of great machines is Technopolis," said the girl. "From it, the Tech-men have waged war on my hunted people. A long time the *neozoans* hoped to survive. They built seven cities, hidden under the *tau* screen. But Dr. Hope died, and the new atomic weapons of the Tech-Men overwhelmed them.

"Then the Tech-Czar began stepping up the power of the *sigma*-field, maintained by the great generators in the central tower of Technopolis. He seeks to spread the New Lands over all the planet. He aims at world dominion—"

"So that's it!" whispered Ames. "It's that machine that makes the Dead Spot grow. Then it must be destroyed!"

ARTHEDNE started to speak, checked herself. Strange dread darkened her violet eyes. Her slender body shuddered in the silver tunic, and the glow of color faded from her drooping antennae. At last she said, gravely:

"That would not be easy, Ames. Technopolis is far distant, and the Tech-men are already hunting us, here. The city, and the tower of Tech-Czar, are guarded well. And the field generators are too vast to be easily wrecked."

"I've a weapon." Ames touched the atomic bombs. "And I can try."

The girl seemed oddly solemn.

"When you are recovered," she murmured slowly. "Now you might remove your armor," she told him. "It is useless since you have taken the drug. And we shall dine."

Silently, she set a table laden with food strange as the flowers that graced it. Eerie music played softly, the threnody of a vanished race. Ames tried to forget the horror beyond the rose-lit colonnades and the desperate task ahead. He drew

the grave, strange beauty of Arthedne down beside him. She was warm and tremulous in his arms, her lips intoxicating. For a space he did forget. . . .

Suddenly Arthedne sprang to her feet, antennae lifted and shimmering with alarm.

"They have found Futuron," she cried. "The spy-plate will show—"

She ran to a tall cabinet. Ames looked over her shoulder, into a hooded screen, and saw the Tech-men. A score of twelve-foot metal giants, they came stalking swiftly out of the flat drear Dead Lands. Gleaming arms gripped strange mechanisms — weapons! Frantically, Ames searched for a gap in the closing rank. But there was only the deadly shining river.

He caught the girl to his body.

"You can fly," he whispered swiftly.

"You can get away. And I'll — meet 'em!"

She shook her golden head, hopelessly.

"They will be watching with the war-rays. They would burn my body in the air." She clung to him, whispering, "Besides, Ames, I would not leave you."

His level blue eyes suddenly narrowed. He snatched one of the little atomic bombs, quickly set its time-screw.

"There is a way!" His voice rang low and grim. "The river!"

He dropped the bomb behind him. Counting under his breath, he caught the girl's arm, ran with her to a tower that stood on the riverward edge of Futuron. Behind them, four Tech-men burst through the rosy screen.

Crouching to meet them, Ames saw bulging, gigantic heads inside the glass and steel of great helmets. He glimpsed tiny, atrophied limbs at the controls of metal bodies. Then the glittering eyes, deep-sunken, huge, lambently nonhuman, discovered them. Bright tubes lifted ominously.

The automatic hammered and jerked in the great hand of Ames. The three nearer giants fell, helmets shattered. But, from the fourth, a green, incandescent finger probed the white columns of Futuron. A graceful central spire exploded—and the rosy screen was gone!

All the flat waste of the Dead Lands was revealed again, and the circle of giants came rushing in, queer weapons level.

"—nineteen," breathed Ames. "Hun-

dred-twenty—*Jump!*”

He dropped the empty gun, swept Arthedne with him off the bluff. The oily shining river leapt up, struck them a cold crushing blow, swallowed them.

A TERRIFIC impact came through the water, as if all the world had rung to the impact of a cosmic hammer. Half stunned, they struggled back to the surface—and dived swiftly again to escape the shattered fragments of the city and its invaders raining on the river.

“Futuron!” Her whisper was choked, sorrowful. “Where I was born—”

They swam down the river. Nothing moved along the darkly gleaming bluffs. They came out at last, lay side by side to rest on a bar of yellow-shining sand. Ames drew the girl into his arms, whispering, “My darling, you know I love you.”

Her violet eyes misted with quick tears. She kissed him, clung to him. Soft warm hues pulsed through her long antennae.

“Hold me closer, Ames,” she murmured, “before joy makes me fly away.” But suddenly her slim body went rigid, as if from a spasm of pain. She sat up. “Why pretend?”

Her voice was hoarse, choked with pain.

“You are like my own people, Ames. There is a new, vital spark—in you, evolution sought to bridge the gap between your race and mine. And I love you, Ames—want you. But you cannot dwell in the New Lands—not long. And I cannot live outside.” She caught a sobbing breath. “Your nature gropes toward mine. But there is still a gulf between that we can never cross. Unless—”

Her violet eyes looked far across the shining river, and she shuddered again.

“Unless as we die!”

They left the river at dawn. Ames examined the remaining atomic bomb, his only weapon; found it unharmed.

“You can guide me,” he asked, “to Technopolis?”

She nodded, solemnly. “But there are many barriers.”

All that day they tramped across the dusty, desolate plain. They saw the gray ribbons where roads had been, and the low square piles of crumbled houses. Now and then, in a small heap of ash, they could trace the white outline of a

human skeleton.

Ames said nothing of his own discomfort. But his skin stung, and the ache was returning to his bones. He began to suffer with torturing thirst.

Arthedne seemed in a strange mood. Sometimes she tried to jest, but always upon her was a shadow. Once she left him, soared away on the wings of splendid flame that spread at will between her delicate antennae.

“It is glorious to fly,” she breathed happily, alighting again beside him. “I wanted one more hour of it.”

The wings flickered out. She caught his hand and they walked on together. The strange dust had fallen again, and the dead plain beginning to glow with unearthly, sullen light, when she paused, pointed.

“There—” she whispered. “Technopolis!”

It stood upon the dark-burning crest of a far-off hill. A wall of metal towers, bathed in a glare of light, palled with greenish smoke. Approaching, they heard the hum and beat of great machines, a harsh and endless reverberation.

“I see,” whispered Ames, “why Dr. Hope repented of creating the Tech-men. For your city of Futuron was a sweet heaven. And this clangorous hell is too much like the cities I have seen.”

They slipped forward again, and Arthedne pointed.

“That highest central spire—the one tipped with cold purple flame—is the tower of the Tech-Czar,” she breathed. “The generators are there.”

Ames clutched his hydrogen bomb. “If we can reach it—”

They came to a twenty-foot barrier of jagged metal blades, from whose points leapt vicious blue sparks. Ames stopped before it, doubtfully. But Arthedne held out her arms to him.

“Hold my wrists,” she whispered. “My wings are strong enough.”

He obeyed, reluctantly. Her antennae spread outward, and the wings of light flashed between them again. Her face set white with pain. But she rose, lifting him. They passed over the fence, glided toward the base of the towers beyond.

“Oh, Ames!” came her tortured breath. “I can’t—”

The bright wings vanished. They

sprawled together on the ground. Ames picked her up. She was breathless, unconscious. In a moment, her violet eyes flickered open.

"Sorry," she whispered. "Exhausted —"

THEY slipped ahead, through luminous gloom, into deep canyons of streets. A group of gigantic robot-like bodies stalked down upon them, strange huge heads visible in helmet-turrets. Ames drew Arthedne back against a wall, looked at her in dismay.

And she had vanished!

A sudden pall of absolute blackness fell upon him. Bewildered, he groped again for her hand, found it tense and quivering. She caught his fingers, returned a swift pressure. In a moment the darkness lifted. The Tech-men had passed.

"We—" Ames gasped. "Invisible?"

The girl nodded, motioned for caution.

"Dr. Hope's evolutionary acceleration created new powers in the neozoans," she whispered, "mostly based on a direct grasp of the warp of space. We fly by one adaptation of it. Another creates a light-deflecting field—but I am not expert enough to do it well for long."

They slipped on toward the lofty central tower. Again and again Arthedne made them briefly invisible, while danger passed. Ames clutched the atomic bomb. They came at last to a main thoroughfare.

"Beyond." She pointed at the next building. "The tower."

Endless ranks of metal giants stalked before them. The pavement shook to a rumbling stream of immense, strange machines. They were like tanks, Ames thought; cannon; and armored cars mounting huge queer tubes.

"The Tech-Czar is prepared for war," whispered Arthedne. "If your race penetrates the New Lands—"

An armed giant came down the alley behind them. She made them invisible until it had passed. The effort left her weak. But a break came at last in the war-like parade. Wrapped again in darkness, they darted across the street.

Ames stumbled on the opposite curb. A dull sob of exhaustion came from the girl. The shroud of darkness vanished, and she fell beside him. Ames saw gigantic Tech-men striding upon them. A

whistle of alarm ripped his nerves.

"Sorry—" Arthedne whispered faintly, and lay still.

Ames set the dial of the bomb at three seconds, hurled it through a window into the tower that made the *sigma*-field. He snatched the girl into his arms, stumbled with her back across the street, just ahead of a lumbering tank.

Scores of the Tech-men, whistling, humming, clicking, were reeling grotesquely toward him. Breathless, Ames counted:

"—two—and—three!"

He dropped with the girl behind the land ironclad, waited for the burst of supernal energy that should level the city. Probably kill them, too; but if it stopped the Dead Spot, that didn't matter. He waited, breathless.

And nothing happened.

A fantastic, clangorous mob, the metal giants came down upon them. Frantically, still, he hoped—until another Tech-man stalked out of the tower, carrying the atomic bomb. The time-fuse was smashed. Could the Tech-men have foreknown—?

A flailing metal arm crushed the thought from his head.

Awareness came back to Ames in a lofty metal hall, lit with the harsh red flicker of neon. Two mechanical giants held him upright, pinioned his arms. Before him stood a great desk, covered with buttons and dials and strange apparatus. Behind it sat another metal-armored body, larger than the rest, its occupant concealed behind a grim visage of steel and glass. The ruler, it must be—the Tech-Czar!

Arthedne was gone—where?

Immense and terrible as a god of steel, the Tech-Czar turned upon Ames. Great cold lenses peered down. A brazen voice boomed through the red-lit hall:

"Man of the old race, why are you here?"

Ames gritted his teeth, twisted against the metal arms.

"Very good," came the sawing voice. "You need not speak aloud. . . . You are Ryeland Ames, chief of the SSS. . . . What are the plans of your organization, against the advance of the New Lands?"

SICK, trembling, Ames tried to make his mind a blank.

"Good," came the rasping, "Then

we need fear no opposition." The steel face turned to the guards. "Take him to the laboratory. Proceed with the dissection of both prisoners. It will provide new data on differing races—and end any opposition from them.

Dissection—both prisoners!

The words throbbed in the aching head of Ames, like a gong of doom. The giants dragged him away. He tensed his body, made a sudden, desperate lunge, jerked away from the one on his right. The other tripped, crashed down awkwardly. He was free.

Arthedne! Where—?

But the metal limbs of the first guard flailed at him. A red bomb of pain exploded in his bruised head. Dimly, he knew that he was being carried—toward the dissection laboratory. . . . Then he was lying on the street. His head throbbed, and his stiff body ached. He struggled upright, incredulously.

For Technopolis was—dead.

The two guards lay beside him on the pavement. Their tiny, big-headed bodies were stiff and blue in the cabs of their sprawled machines. Technopolis had stopped. All the Tech-men he could see were dead. What had happened?

And Arthedne—where was she?

He stumbled uncertainly across the silent street. Beyond the end of it, he glimpsed a remote vista of the Dead Lands—oddly changed. The weird luminosity was gone. The consuming fire in his own body, he realized suddenly, had diminished.

"Ames!"

A weakening voice sobbed his name. Arthedne dropped beside him. Her bright wings turned pallid, vanished. She swayed. He caught her in his arms.

"Arthedne," he whispered. "My darling—what—?"

"I did it, Ames—for you. Invisible, I escaped them, and flew to the tower. I reversed the *sigma*-field—Dr. Hope gave us the secret of that. It ended the New Lands—and the Tech-men—and—me!"

She shuddered in his arms.

"Good-by, Ames, dear. But, try—"

She clung to him. He kissed her lips—they seemed already cold. Her arms stiffened suddenly. A clear crimson gleam pulsed through her antennae. Trembling, she gasped:

"Quick, Ames! The tower! The

Tech-Czar—still alive—"

The warning uttered, she went limp in his arms. The antennae drooped, turned lifeless gray. Heavy lids fell wearily across the pools of her eyes. Ames laid her down tenderly, and ran into the tower.

An elevator, when his fumbling had mastered the controls, shot him upward. He leapt out, into the vast, red-litten hall of the Tech-Czar.

The seat behind the desk was empty, the metal-bodied ruler gone. Had the Tech-Czar protected himself against reversal of the field? Ames caught a gleam from the desk—a tiny hypodermic, lying in a stain of spilled green liquid.

Meshing gears clashed, beyond, followed by a rising whine. Terror struck Ames, a stunning avalanche. That must be the *sigma*-field generator, that Arthedne had stopped. The Tech-Czar must be setting it going again, to restore the Dead Spot!

Staggered with despair, Ames realized that he was unarmed. He ran back toward the elevator, snatched from a dead Tech-man a heavy thing of crystal and white metal that might serve as a club.

With that, he stumbled into the vast room beyond the desk of the Tech-Czar. It was crowded with tremendous mechanisms. Some he could recognize. Atomic converters, evidently based on the same principles he had discovered. Colossal generators, transformers, thirty-foot vacuum tubes. Vast coils wound on a cylindrical core that must be the base, he thought, of the purple-shining spire.

That thing made the Dead Spot!

His bewildered, racing eyes found another thing he recognized: a replica of his own super-cyclotron. Its 400-ton electro-magnet loomed forty feet above. He saw its ray-screened observation cage, far across the room. Had his own discovery been turned against the world?

THEN he saw the Tech-Czar, towering beside the switchboard of the *sigma*-field generator. Ames shuddered, his fingers tense on the club. What could he do, against the steel tons of that fifteen-foot colossus?

Yet he made himself slip forward. The mounting river of tremendous sound swept away the little noise he made. Faint hope lifted him. Perhaps, one sudden blow—

But that lofty head turned abruptly. Huge lenses stared at him, out of that monstrous metal visage. And a great metal voice grated out:

"Well, Ryeland Ames! You come in time to witness the finish of your race. We had been expanding the New Lands slowly, to make room for Technopolis only as we required it. But now I am stepping up the field to embrace all the planet—and blot out your degraded and obsolescent breed!"

The Tech-Czar bent ominously toward the control board. And the aching body of Ames tensed, quivered. He steadied himself against the cold mass of the super-cyclotron, tried to calm his spinning brain.

"You have not destroyed Technopolis, Ryeland Ames." The huge lenses glittered at him, like blue orbs of evil. "For I am Technopolis!"

A giant arm dropped toward the dials and switches.

"Wait!" The voice of Ames came hoarse and breathless, choked with a startled incredulity. "*Tech-Czar!*—I know who you are! And I know how to stop you—and Technopolis!"

Slowly, his trembling hands lifted the unfamiliar weapon.

"And I know why the SSS failed to stop the Dead Lands," rang his hard accusations. "And why my plane fell in the Dead Lands! And why my atomic bomb did not explode—"

The metal colossus had reeled away from the control-board. It came lumbering toward him with a tread that shook the floor. The frantic fingers of Ames fumbled with the unknown device, as if he half-understood it.

"I know why you survived the Tech-men!"

The shining giant towered over him. Steel limbs crushed down, like colossal hammers. Ames dropped the unfamiliar weapon, flung himself back against the super-cyclotron.

"Die!" rasped the Tech-Czar. "With your evil breed—"

But the groping fingers of Ames found a familiar lever. Blue sparks leapt from an automatic switch. The hum of the generators deepened, to a new load. The dropped weapon flew toward the colossal magnet, crashed and clung against it.

The brazen voice of the Tech-Czar instantly stopped. And the great metal

body toppled deliberately forward. Ames pushed back the little lever, to stop the super-cyclotron, stepped quickly aside. The Tech-Czar crashed down where he had stood.

"No, your metal disguise didn't take me in," he whispered softly to the inert, colossal mechanism. "Because I saw the needle on your desk, and the spilled catalyst. And I knew how to stop you, because once I ruined a good watch by coming too near when the super-cyclotron was running—and I knew that the magnetic relay in your head was a good deal more delicate than a watch."

The fall had shattered the crystal panels from the turret. And the gaunt gray face that stared up at Ames, rigid and hideous in the unseeing agony of death, was the face of Dr. Gresham Rathbone!

"When the Tech-Czar didn't die," whispered Ames, "I knew he was a man. And you were the logical one. Because you had worked with Dr. Hope, and knew all about the Tech-men—more than you ever told me.

"You were jealous of Hope, and hated him—that's clear from your lies about him. You must have been eager enough to lead the revolt of the Tech-men. And you must have made millions out of the transmuted metals, slipping in and out by rocket!"

Ames stopped the atomic converters, stilled that thundering river of power. He went back, weary and alone, through the Tech-Czar's silent hall, and down to the voiceless streets.

IN the gray cold light of a cheerless dawn, he sought Arthedne. Chilled, shivering, he peered up and down the shadowed canyon. In its hushed quiet, death was a near reality. Ames hadn't realized how tired he was, or what irreparable damage the radiations of the Dead Lands had done his big body. He reeled. His vision blurred. All his being was a flame of slow, quenchless fire.

But he stumbled on. At last his failing eyes glimpsed a shapeless blot of white, unmoving on the pavement. That must be Arthedne. Last of the wondrous race that might have come—

He halted, groping, bewildered.

Light as a breath of wind, something had brushed his stinging face. His dimming eyes caught a flicker of gay color,

tenuous, vanishing. A sweet, familiar voice came to him, faintly:

"Wait, Ames—my darling! Don't go back to—that. For I am here!"

He put out his hands, fumbling blindly.

"Arthedne?" he whispered incredulously. "You are still—living? Where are you, Arthedne? It is growing so dark! I heard your voice, but I can't see you."

"Here I am, Ames," he thought she said. "Here beside you."

He felt a light cool touch on his shoulder. Swaying heavily on his feet, he spurred his weary senses, trying to see her again.

"I thought—" he gasped, "thought—you died."

"Yes, Ames, my body died." The tiny voice came through thickening mists, from far away. "But there was another power, which I had only suspected, that came to me in the moment of death. Through the same organs that enabled

me to fly and to vanish, it created a new field in space, that can be the dwelling of my being, forever."

He swayed, giddily.

"I feel in you something of the same power, Ames—for in you was evolution following the path of my lost people. With the aid of that—if you will try, Ames dear—you can come to me."

The mists closed in, dense and black. A cold numbness blotted away all pain. Ames knew, dimly, that he was falling.

"Come to me, Ames." Small and definitely remote, he still heard Arthedne's voice. "Come across the barrier!"

He tried—

The Special Secret Service discovered, that day, that the Dead Spot was no longer dead. A plane landed at noon on the gray dust beside Technopolis, and triple S operatives hastened to explore its silent wonders. They found Ryeland Ames and Arthedne, lying side by side. On both their faces was the shadow of a wondering, hopeful smile.



Test yourself on these questions. Answers and scoring points are given on page 71. In every case, tell *all* you can. For example, if the question were "What is a light year?" a full score answer would be "The distance traversed by light in one year, *which is approximately six trillion miles.*" But a partial score would be allowed for *either* the definition or the approximate figure (within a range indicated in each case). If you are interested in your standing compared with that of other readers, send in your score; next month we will announce the general average, and the ten highest scores with the names of persons making them.

1. What is a parsec?
2. Name the nearest star.
3. What is an astronomic unit?
4. A cell of living matter consists of cytoplasm, metaplastm, and protoplasm. Explain these terms.
5. Calculate the earth's orbital speed.
6. What are perihelion and aphelion?
7. Explain the difference between meteor, meteorite, and meteoroid.
8. What are anabolism, catabolism, and metabolism?
9. What are protist and protein?
10. Rank the five outer planets in order of greatest size and give their diameters.

(Answers to Questions on Page 71)

THE THIRTY AND ONE

by DAVID H. KELLER



A mist filled the room and swirled widdershams in thirty pillars around the table

CECIL, OverLord of Walling in the Dark Forest, mused by the fire. The Blind Singer of Songs had sung the sagas of ancient times, had waited long for praise and then, disquiet, had left the banquet hall guided by his dog. The Juggler had merrily tossed his golden balls into the air till they seemed a glistening cascade, but still the OverLord had mused, unseeing. The wise Homoneulus had crouched at his feet uttering words of wisdom and telling tales of Gobi and the buried city of Ankor. But nothing could rouse the OverLord from his meditations.

At last he stood up and struck the silver bell with a hammer of gold. Serving



"I will drink the elixir of synthesis," spoke lovely Lady Angelica, "and thus thirty of our bravest warriors will pass into my body—to be liberated again in the castle of the giant who is draining the life-blood of our people!"

men answered the call.

"Send me the Lady Angelica and Lord Gustavo," he commanded and then once again sat down with chin in hand, waiting.

At last the two came in answer to his summons. The Lady was his only daughter, as fair and as wise a Lady as there was in all Walling. Lord Gustavo some day would be her husband and help her rule in the Dark Forest. Meantime he perfected himself in the use of the broadsword, lute, the hunting with the falcon and the study of books. He was six foot tall, twenty years old and had in him the makings of a man.

The three sat around the fire, two waiting to hear the one talk, the one waiting till he knew just how to say what had to be said. At last Cecil began to talk.

"You no doubt know what is on my mind. For years I have tried to have happiness and peace and prosperity to the simple folk in our land of Walling. We were well situated in a valley surrounded by lofty, impassable forests. Only one mountain pass connected us with the great, cruel and almost unknown world around us. Into that world we sent in springtime, summer and fall our caravans of mules laden with grain, olives, wine and uncut stones. From that world we brought salt, weapons, bales of woolen and silken goods for our needs. No one tried to molest us, for we had nothing much that they coveted. Perhaps safety made us grow soft, sleepy and unprepared for danger.

"But it has come. We might have known there were things in that outer world we knew not of and therefore could not even dream of. But this spring our first caravan, winding over the mountains found, at the boundaries of the Dark Forest a Castle blocking their way. Their mules were not birds and could not fly over; they were not moles and could not burrow under. And the lads with the mules were not warriors and could not break their way through. So they came back, unmolested, 'tis true, but with their goods unsold and unbartered.

"**N**OW I do not think that Castle was built by magic. I have personally looked at it and it seems nothing but stone and mortar. And it is not held by an army of fighting men, for all we can hear of is that one man holds it. But

what a man! Half again as tall as our finest lad, and skilled in the use of weapons. I tried him out. One at a time I sent to him John of the flying ax and Herman who had no equal with the double-edged sword and Rubin who could split a willow wand at two hundred paces with his steel-tipped arrow. These three men lie, worm food, in the ravine below the castle. And meantime our country is strangled as far as trade is concerned. We have cattle in the meadow and wood in the forest and grain in the bin but we have no salt, no clothes to cover us from the cold, no finery for our women or weapons for our men. And we never will have as long as this castle and this man blocks our caravans."

"We can capture the Castle and kill the giant!" cried Lord Gustavo, with the impetuosity of youth.

"How?" asked the OverLord. "Did I not tell you that the path is narrow? You know that. On one side the mountains tower lofty as the flight of the bird and smooth as a woman's skin. On the other side is the Valley of the Daemons and no one has ever fallen into it and come back alive. And the only path just wide enough for one man or one man-led mule, and that path now leads through the castle. If we could send an army 'twould be different. But only one man at a time, and there is no one man equal to successful combat with this giant."

The Lady Angelica smiled as she whispered, "We may conquer him through chicanery. For example, I have seen this hall filled with fighting men and fair ladies almost put into an endless sleep by gazing at the golden balls flying through the air and back into the clever hands of the Juggler. And the Blind Singer of Songs can make anyone forget all except the music of his tales. And our Homunculus is very wise."

The OverLord shook his head. "Not thus will the question be answered. This madman wants one thing, and that one thing means everything in the lastward, as far as our land and people are concerned. Perhaps you have guessed. I will give you the demand ere you ask the question. Our Lady's hand in marriage, and thus when I die he becomes the OverLord of Walling."

Lady Angelica looked at Lord Gustavo. He looked at the OverLord's daughter. At last he said:

"Better to eat our grain and eat our olives and drink our wine. Better that our men wear bearskins and our women cover themselves with the skins of deers. It would be best for them to wear shoes of wood than pantufles of unicorn skin brought from Araby. It were a sweeter fate for them to perfume their bodies with crushed violets and may-flowers from our forest than to smell sweet with perfumes from the trees of the unknown Island of the East. This price is too heavy. Let us live as our fathers and fathers' fathers lived, even climb trees like the monkey folk, than trust to such an OverLord. Besides I love the Lady Angelica."

The Lady smiled her thanks. "I still am thinking of the use of intelligence overcoming brawn. Have we no wisdom left in Walling, besides the fair, faint dreams of a weak woman?"

"I will send for the Homoneulous," her father answered. "He may know the answer to that question."

The little man came in. A man not born of women, but grown for seven years in a glass bottle, during all of which time he read books held before him by wise men, and was nourished with drops of wine and tiny balls of Asphodel paste. He listened to the problem gravely, though at times he seemed asleep. At last he said one word,

"Synthesis."

Cecil reached over and, picking him up, placed him on one knee.

"Have pity on us, Wise Man. We are but simple folk and know but simple words. What is the meaning of this sage word?"

"I know not," was the peculiar answer. "'Tis but a word that came to me out of the past. It has a sweet sound and methinks may have a meaning. Let me think. I recall now! It was when I was in the glass bottle that a wise man came and held before my eyes an illuminated parchment and on it was written in words of gold this word and its meaning."

"Synthesis. All things are one and one thing is all."

"Which makes it all the harder for me," sighed the OverLord of Walling.

THE Lady Angelica left her seat and came over to her father. She sank upon the bearskin at his feet and took the little hand of the dwarf in hers.

"Tell me, my dear Homoneulous, what wise man 'twas who thus gave you the message on the illuminated parchment?"

"It was a very wise man and a very old man who lives by himself in a cave by the babbling brook, and yearly the simple folk take him bread and meat and wine, but for years no one has seen him. And perhaps he lives and perhaps he is dead, for all I know is that the food disappears, but perhaps the birds think that it is for them now that he lies sightless and thoughtless on his stone bed these many years."

"This is something we will find out for ourselves. Lord Gustavo, order horses and the four of us will go to this man's cave. Three horses for us, my Lord, and an ambling pad for our little friend so nought of harm will befall him."

The four came to the cave and the four entered it. A light burned at the far end and there was the wise man, very old and with nought but his eyes telling of the intelligence that never ages. On the table before him in a tangled confusion were glass and earthenware and crucibles and one each of astrolabe, alembic and hourglass through which silver sands ran, and this was fixed with cunning machinery so that every day it tilted around and once more let the sand tell the passing of the twenty-and-four hours. There were books covered with mildewed leather and locked with iron padlocks and spider webs. Hung from the wet ceiling was a representation of the sun with the planets revolving eternally around that fair orb, but the pitted moon alternated with light and shadows.

And the wise man read from a book written in letters made by those long dead, and now and then he ate a crust of bread or sipped wine from a ram's horn, but never did he stop reading and when they touched him on the shoulder to attract his attention he shook them off murmuring, "By the Seven Sacred Caterpillars! let me finish this page, for what a pity were I to die without knowing what this man wrote some thousand years ago in Ankor."

But at last he finished the page and sat blinking at them with his wise eyes sunk deep into a mummy face while his body shook with the decrepitude of age. And Cecil asked him,

"What is the meaning of the word 'synthesis'?"

"'Tis a dream of mine which only now I find the waking meaning of."

"Tell the dream," the OverLord commanded.

"'Tis but a dream. Suppose there were thirty wise men learned in all wisdom obtained from the reading of ancient books on alchemy and magic and histories and philosophy. These men knew of animals and jewels such as margarites and chrysoberyls and of all plants such as Dittany which cures wounds and Mandragora which compelleth sleep (though why men should want to sleep when there is so much to read and profit by the reading I do not know). But these men are old and some day will die. So I would take these thirty old men and one young man and have them drink a wine that I have distilled these many years and by synthesis there would only be one body—that of the young man—but in that man's brain would be all the subtle and ancient wisdom of the thirty savants, and thus we would do century after century so no wisdom would be lost to the world."

The Lady Angelica leaned over his shoulder. "And have you made this wine?" she asked.

"Yes, and now I am working on its opposite, for why place thirty bodies into one unless you know the art of once again separating this one body into the original thirty. But that is hard. For any fool can pour the wine from thirty bottles into a single jar, but who is wise enough to separate them and restore them to their original bottles?"

"Have you tried this wine of synthetic magic?" asked the OverLord.

"Partly. I took a crow and a canary-bird and had them drink of it and now in yonder wicker cage a yellow crow sits and nightly fills my cave with song as though it came from the lutes and citherns of fairie-land."

"**N**OW that is my thought," cried the Lady Angelica. "We will take the best and bravest fighters of our land and the sweetest singer of songs and the best juggler of golden balls and thirty of them, and I myself will drink of this synthetic wine and thus the thirty will pass into my body and I will go and visit the Giant and in his hall I will drink of the other wine and there will be thirty to fight against the one and they will over-

come him and slay him and then I will drink again of the vital wine and in my body I will carry the thirty conquerors back to Walling and then again drink and in my body carry the thirty heroes of this battle back to the dark forest, there to be liberated by your wonder wine. Have you enough of it, of both kinds?"

The old man looked puzzled.

"I have a flagon of the synthetic wine. Of the other to change the synthesized back into their original bodies only enough for one experiment and mayhaps a few drops more."

"Try those drops on that yellow bird," commanded Cecil.

The old man poured from a bottle of pure gold, graven with a worm that eternally renewed his youth by swallowing his tail, a few drops of a colorless liquid and offered it to the yellow bird in the wicker cage. This bird drank greedily and of a sudden there were two birds, a black crow and a yellow canary and ere the canary could pipe a song the crow pounced on it and killed it.

"It works," croaked the old man. "It works."

"Can you make more of the second elixir?" asked Lord Gustro.

"What I do once I can do twice," proudly said the ancient.

"Then start and make more, and while you are doing it we will take the golden bottle and the flagon and see what can be done to save the simple folk of our dark forests, though this is an adventure that I think little of for 'tis fraught with danger for a woman I love." Thus spake the OverLord.

And with the elixirs in a safe place they rode away from the cave of the old man. But Lord Gustro took the OverLord aside and said,

"I ask a favor. Allow me to be one of these thirty men."

Cecil shook his head. "No. And once again and forever NO! In the doing of this I stand to lose the apple of my eye, and if she comes not back to me I shall die of grief, and then you and you alone will be left to care for my simple folk. If a man has but two arrows and shoots one in the air, then he were wise to keep the other in his quiver against the day of need."

The Lady Angelica laughed as she suspected the reason of their whispering.

"I will come back," she said laughingly, "for the old man was very wise, and did you not see how the yellow bird divided into two and the crow killed the canary?"

But the Homoneulous held in Lord Cecil's arms started to cry.

"What wouldst thou?" asked the kindly OverLord.

"I would be back in my bottle again," sobbed the little one. And he sobbed till he went to sleep soothed by the rocking canter of the war horse.

TWO evenings later a concourse of brave men met in the banquet hall. There were great silent men skilled in the use of mace, byrnie and baldricks, who could slay with sword, spear and double-bitted battle-ax. The Juggler was there, and a singer of songs and a reader of books, very young but very wise. And a man was there with sparkling eyes who could by their glance put men to death-sleep and waken them with the snap of thumb and finger. And to these were added the OverLord and Lord Gustro and the trembling Homoneulous and on her throne sat the Lady Angelica very beautiful and very happy because of the great adventure she had a part to play in. And in her hand was a golden goblet and in the hand of the thirty men crystal glasses, and the thirty and one drinking vessels were filled with the wine of synthesis, for half of the flagon was poured out, but the flagon, half filled and the golden drug viand the Lady Angelica hid beneath her shimmering robe. Outside a ladies' horse, decked with diamond-studded harness, neighed uneasy in the moonlight.

LORD CECIL explained the adventure, and all the thirty men sat very still and solemn; for never had they heard the like before, for they none feared a simple death but this dissolution was a thing that made even the bravest wonder what the end would be. But when the time came and the command given they one and all drained their vessels and even as the Lady drank her wine they drank to the last drop.

Then there was a silence broken only by the shrill cry of a hoot owl, complaining to the moon, concerning the doings of the night folk in the dark forest. The little Homoneulous hid his face in the

shoulder of the OverLord but Cecil and Lord Gustro looked straight ahead of them over the banquet table to see what was to be seen.

The thirty men seemed to shiver and then grew smaller in a mist that covered them and finally only empty places were left at the banquet table, and empty glasses. And only the two men and the Lady Angelica and the shivering Homoneulous were left. And the Lady laughed.

"It worked," she cried. "I look the same but I feel different, for in me are the potential bodies of the thirty brave men who will overcome the Giant and bring peace to the land. And now I will give you the kiss of hail and farewell and will adventure forth on my waiting horse." And kissing her Father on the mouth and her lover on the cheek and the little one on the top of his curly-haired head she ran bravely out of the room and through the stillness they could hear her horse's hoofs, silver-shod, pounding on the stones of the courtyard.

"I am afraid," shivered the little one. "I have all wisdom but I am afraid as to this adventure and its ending."

Lord Cecil comforted him. "You are afraid because you are so very wise. Lord Gustro and I would like to fear, but we are too foolish to do so. Can I do anything to comfort you, little friend of mine?"

"I wish I were back in my bottle," sobbed the Homoneulous, "but that cannot be because the bottle was broken when I was taken from it, for the mouth of it was very narrow, and a bottle once broken cannot be made whole again." So all that night Lord Cecil rocked him to sleep singing to him lullabies while Lord Gustro sat wakeful before the fire biting his finger nails, and wondering what the ending would be.

LATE that night the Lady Angelica arrived at the gate of the Giant Castle and blew her wreathed horn. The Giant dropped the iron-studded gate and curiously peered at the lady on the horse.

"I am the Lady Angelica," said the Lady, "and I have come to be your bride if only you will give free passage to our caravans so we can commerce with the great world outside, and when my father dies you will be OverLord of our

land, and perchance I will come to love you, for you are a fine figure of a man and I have heard much of you."

The giant towered over the head of her horse and he placed his hand around her waist and plucked her from the horse and carried her to his banquet hall and sat her down at one end of the table. And laughing in a somewhat silly manner he walked around the room and lit pine torches and tall candles till at last the whole room was lighted. And he poured a large glass of wine for the Lady and a much larger glass for himself and he sat at the other end of the table and laughed again as he cried.

"It all was as I dreamed. But who would have thought that the noble Lord Cecil and the brave Lord Gustro would have been so craven! Let's drink to our wedding, and then to the bridal chamber."

And he drank his drink in one swallow. But the Lady Angelica took from under her gown a golden flask and raising it she cried,

"I drink to you and your future, whatever it is." And she drained the golden flask and sat very still. A mist filled the room and swirled widdershams in thirty pillars around the long oak table, and when it cleared there were thirty men between the Giant and the Lady.

THE Juggler took his golden balls, and the man with the dazzling eyes looked hard on the Giant and the student took from his robe a book and read the wise sayings of dead Gods backwards, while the singer of songs plucked his harp strings and sang of the brave deeds of brave men long dead. But the fighting men rushed forward and on all sides started the battle. The Giant jumped back, picked a mace from the wall and fought as never man fought before. He had two things in mind, to kill and to reach the smiling lady and strangle her with bare hands for the thing she had done to him. But ever between him and the Lady was a wall of men who with steel and song and dazzling eyes formed a living wall that could be bent and crushed but never broken.

For centuries after in the halls of Walling the blind singers of songs told of that fight while the simple folk sat silent while they listened to the tale. And no

doubt as the tale past from one singer aged to the next singer young it became ornamented and embroidered and fabricated into something somewhat different from what really happened that night. But even the bare truth telling first hand as told in parts by those who battled was a great enough tale. For men fought and bled and died in that hall and finally the Giant dying broke through and almost reached the lady, but then the song man tripped him with his harp and the wise man threw his heavy tome in his face and the juggler shattered his three golden balls against the giant's forehead, and at the lastward the glittering eyes of the sleep-maker fastened on the dying eyes of the giant and sent him sleepily on his last sleep.

And the Lady Angelica looked around the shattered hall and the thirty men who had all done their part and she said softly, "These be brave men and they have done what was necessary for the good of their country and for the honor of our land and I cannot forsake them or leave them hopeless," and she took the rest of the wine of synthesis and she drank part, and to every man she gave a drink, even the dead men whose mouths she had to gently open and wipe the blood from gritted teeth ere she could pour the wine into their breathless mouths. And she went back to her seat and sitting there she waited.

The mist again filled the hall and covered the dead and dying and those who were not hurt badly but panted from the fury of the battle. And when the mist cleared only the Lady Angelica was left there, for all the thirty had returned to her body through the magic of the synthetic wine.

And the Lady said to herself,

"I feel old and in many ways different, and my strength has gone from me, and I am glad there is no mirror to show me my whitened hair and bloodless cheeks, for the men who have come back into me were dead men and those not dead were badly hurt and I must get back to my horse before I fall into a faint of death."

She tried to walk out, but stumbling fell. On hands and knees she crawled to where her horse waited for her. She pulled herself up into the saddle and with her girdle she tied herself there and then told the horse to go home. But she

lay across the saddle like a dead woman.

THE horse brought her back. Ladies in waiting took her to her bed and washed her withered limbs and gave her warm drinks and covered her wasted body with coverlets of lambs wool and the wise physicians mixed healing drinks for her and finally she recovered sufficiently to tell her father and her lover the story of the battle of the thirty against the Giant and how he was dead and the land safe.

"And now go to the old man and get the other elixir," she whispered, "and when it works have the dead buried with honor and the wounded gently and wisely cared for and then we will come to the end of the adventure and it will be one that the singer of songs will tell of for many winter evenings to the simple folk of Walling."

"You stay with her, Lord Gustro," commanded the OverLord, "and I will take the wise Homoneulous in my arms and gallop to the cave and secure the elixir, and when I return we will have her drink it and once again she will be whole and young again and then I will have you two lovers marry, for I am not as young as I was and I want to live to see the throne secure and, the Gods willing, Grandchildren running around the castle."

LORD GUSTRO sat down by his lady's bed and he took her wasted

hand in his warm one and he placed a kiss on her white lips with his red warm ones and he whispered, "No matter what happens and no matter what the end of the adventure I will always love you, Heart-of-mine." And Lady Angelica smiled on him and went to sleep.

Through the dark forest Cecil, OverLord of Walling, galloped with the little wise man in his arms. He flung himself off his war horse and ran quickly into the cave.

"Have you finished the elixir?" he cried.

The old man looked up, as though in doubt as to what the question was. He was breathing heavily now and little drops of sweat rolled down his leathery face.

"Oh! Yes! I remember now. The elixir that would save the lady and take from her the thirty bodies of the men we placed in her by virtue of our synthetic magic. I remember now! I have been working on it. In a few more minutes it will be finished."

And dropping forward on the oak table he died. In falling, a withered hand struck a golden flask and overturned it on the floor. Liquid amber ran over the dust of ages. A cockroach came and drank of it and suddenly died.

"I am afraid," moaned the little Homoneulous. "I wish I were back in my bottle."

But Cecil, OverLord of Walling, did not know how to comfort him.

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ALWAYS LOOK FOR THE RED CIRCLE ON THE COVER



Conducted by **DONALD DALE**

This department is going to run a series of excursions to all the remarkable places you read about in science stories. In a sense they will be expeditions, for notes will be made on the *probability* of the things done and the wonders seen. Since you won't want to miss these excursions, here's your commutation ticket. We will travel to places near and far, in space and in time; and before we are done we shall make an even stranger journey that will bring us face to face with ourselves. But we will start now with an easier trip.

* * * * *

HALF an hour after passing Deimos, the rocket tubes are reversed and at reduced speed our space-ship slips through the outer atmosphere of Mars. Unknown to us, there is feverish activity fifty miles below, on the surface of the Red Planet. For days the North and South Polar Observatories have studied this strange object sweeping in from space and, its true character determined at last by the aid of the spectroscope, preparations have been made for its arrival.

Leaving the ship, we trudge toward a broad canal that stretches away in either direction as far as the eye can see. A strip of forest, choked with monstrous vegetation, clings to the edge of the canal. Elsewhere there is only fine red sand glowing in the light of the shrunken sun. Until a score of gigantic figures burst from the copse!

Twice—thrice!—the size of Earthmen, and brandishing strangely shaped guns of black metal, the Martians are almost upon us before we can move. Turning, we run for the space-ship, nearly a mile away. Fifteen, twenty feet at a stride we take and in less than a minute we have covered half the distance, hopelessly outdistancing our pursuers. Then a Martian raises his gun.

Suddenly, as we race up to the ship, a weird radiance plays over its entire surface. For an instant the ship writhes like a living thing, shudders once—and is gone!

Then, though no word has been spoken, into our brains thunders an imperious command from the advancing Martians, and as we reach for our guns—

But stop! you say. This is just another yarn. Wherein lies its high order of probability?

Let us see.

The Earth Bombarded

GODDARD has proved that rockets can fly in the absence of air or atmosphere of any kind. Ley's experiments show that a rocket ship, capable of carrying passengers and constructed to give them adequate protection, could be sent up with the necessary velocity. And astronomers could easily plot its course, taking advantage of all favorable gravitational factors.

The topographical features of Mars are generally accepted from observational data. The effect on us of lesser surface gravity is obvious. The size of the Martians follows reasonably—if not necessarily, as Lowell believed—from the same cause, and even the most conservative scientists admit that at least Mars and Venus are capable of supporting life and it may well exist on many planets of other sun-stars. Indeed, as we shall later see, it is less reasonable to assume that it does not.

But what of the remarkable weapon with which the Martians have demolished our space-ship? Only the 200,000 mile shield of the terrestrial magnetic field saves us from a like fate on Earth! From unknown reaches of outer space we are constantly bombarded by Cosmic Rays, the most destructive agent in the Universe. Charged particles travelling at tremendous velocities, some of them exceed the two billion volt energy needed

to burst through the Earth's magnetic field; slashing through our atmosphere, they collide with its atoms, blast out particles with such immense energy that the latter in turn can drive through sixteen feet of lead. Or smash and ionize *other* atoms. And energy of lesser yet comparably destructive power is available to us from radium and from cathode tube, Alpha, Beta, and Gamma rays in the form of particles or radiation. In sufficient concentration, and perhaps directed by a short wave-length carrier, they could duplicate the Martians' feat of destroying our space-ship, reducing it to smashed atoms.

As for telepathic communication, we can even disregard the known electrical nature of thought with the possibilities that follow from it, and consider only the roof of extra-sensory perception piled up in our universities in so short a time. Mars, with one-seventh the volume of Earth, must have cooled much sooner to the point of being able to give rise to, or support, life. As a consequence, its inhabitants would be ahead of us in intellectual development and might have more fully developed the latent powers of the mind. Yet if we go with these Martians who have captured us, we will see sufficient wonders without assuming their actual knowledge surpasses ours a whit.

Temper and Tomatoes

LET us throw down our guns. The leader of the Martians has just assured us we will not be harmed if the Intellectuals find we have no inimical intentions in visiting their planet. We certainly have none, and we are only startled by the implications of what he has just said. The Martians must be divided into Workers, Soldiers, Thinkers. And that is more than a class distinction. It implies qualitative differences beyond normal variation among individuals!

The leader, sensing our thoughts, confirms this conclusion but explains that he, merely one of the many Soldier-Leaders sent out to seize us wherever we landed, cannot explain further. As we walk along, however, we reflect that our own genetic studies have shown that mental characteristics are hereditary factors and hence could be developed eugenically in a society willing to let science rather than love bring mates together. And ants and bees have physical specialization

among individuals, apparently caused by different feeding in the early stages of development. That makes us remember that wide physical variations between related groups on Earth, like the Sikhs and Pathans in the north of India and the Madrasis in the south, have been ascribed to dietary differences. And this conclusion has been proved by experiments with rats which have produced, in the offspring of one parent stock, radical differences in size, physical condition, mental characteristics and temperament.

We have now reached a broad, smooth highway bordering the canal, where we are whisked away in a radically streamlined auto at a speed of several hundred miles an hour. The design of the car is more advanced than any we have on the market, but we know that our engineers' designs are years ahead of what is turned out. Manufacturers, to save money, must change models gradually. They could also give us this speed, but for the prohibitive price it would put upon passenger cars, for it is little faster than Campbell's experimental runs on Daytona Beach. And it could be handled on roads like this, with a perfect surface. We ask the Leader what it is.

Glass! we are informed. We are surprised only until we remember that this too has been done on Earth. Road surfacing blocks, little affected by weather conditions, grease or oil, have been made in England of this hardest synthetic material obtainable, by melting broken glass and molding it into forms under high pressure. By now we are growing accustomed to a world where wonders differ only quantitatively from ours, and we perhaps do not accord a sufficient respect to the great glass-covered city of towering glass buildings we now enter by the Fifth Level express highway.

Utopia and Sunlight

THE open-air television news-reel theatres, playing to tremendous throngs, give us momentary pause until we realize the achievement is within our grasp on Earth but is being held back because of the great capital outlay necessary and the uncertainty of profit to investors. But we prick up our ears when we are informed that the entire city is air-conditioned and that the tremendous amount of power required is supplied by—the Sun!

Still, the Frenchman Dubos and Abbott of the Smithsonian Institution have made working models of solar power plants. Their only objectionable feature is that they cannot be operated as profitably as hydro-electric plants because of the interest charges on the high initial investments they require. Otherwise Earth would have abundant power, for it receives twice as much light and heat as Mars from the Sun, a potential 200,000,000 h.p. per minute per square mile or enough in four or five minutes to turn all the machines in the world—and more, to do even the labors now done by men's hands.

It suddenly occurs to us that we are losing many benefits because we live in a society where profit is the only recognized value. And for that matter, because of our resistance to new ideas, we benefit less from some of the advances of science than the animals it experiments on. But we are much less interested in economics and social psychology at the moment than in meeting the Intellectuals.

Colloids and Colds

THE Intellectuals are quickly satisfied that we are in truth on an excursion and, falling in with our plans enthusiastically, offer to aid us. Though we have no idea of how remarkable that aid will be, we are thanking them when one of the Intellectuals inquires if we would be interested in seeing the process by which he is going to cure a headache that has become extremely painful.

At our assent, he drinks a small amount of liquid from a phial and steps behind a huge screen. Immediately we see a greatly magnified fluoroscopic picture of his brain, with nerve ends jangling and writhing. And then, as a myriad of infinitesimal objects flood into the tiny brain capillaries, the nerves suddenly cease twisting and relax! A moment later the Intellectual steps out from behind the screen, his headache gone.

We are properly amazed, until he informs us that what we have seen is a cure effected by the introduction of colloidal metals. Why, we have done that on Earth! We know that living cells obtain their energy from minerals and metals, which nature supplies in colloidal form; we have produced them in the laboratory; and we know how they work. Sick

and dead and broken-down cells are attracted to the colloids by electric-magnetic force and are carried away by them in the blood stream after the system has adjusted its metallic unbalance by adapting what it needs from the same colloids. We have made dead flowers bloom, treated sinus trouble, mange, and goiter, and cured chronic alcoholism with the very treatment that is used by the Martians.

Cosmic Monsters

DISAPPOINTED once more, we think of what is often claimed for science stories: "Fiction today, fact tomorrow." We are inclined to make a correction: *Fact today*. But we are hopeful, for we are going to take other excursions and we may yet find what seems fiction to us. Perhaps on some planet of another sun-star, where life has had millions of years longer than ours to develop, we shall find things whose very components are undreamed of on Earth.

But will we find life at all? What right have we to think that it is protean, that it spreads throughout the universes, when we do not know what it is at all! Living matter cannot be analyzed as such, for the methods of analysis kill it. But we do know there are no elements in it not common enough in our non-living world.

It is one theory that by chance combination these elements may have been built up, in some quiet pool by the chemistry of the Sun, into specks of nitrogenous carbonaceous jelly from which rose the first living organism. What has happened once *must* happen again and again in an infinity of worlds.

We have just remembered the Cosmic Rays. They may rise to incredible intensity in other corners of space. And the magnetic field of our remote planet, weaker than that of Earth, may let them all through—to batter the genes that control physical heredity, and produce monsters! We think of the mutations that have been produced in the fly by our experiments with X-rays and then we try to imagine the effect on man of multi-billion volt bombardments for thousands of generations. No longer will there be men on that unlucky planet—but cosmic monsters.

Yet we shall go there on our next Excursion to Possibility.

ROUT OF THE FIRE-IMPS

by STANTON A. COBLENTZ

Author of "Through the Time-Radio," etc.

Without taking time to seize
so much as a hat or coat,
he fled with his wife and
family



**From Venus, on the wings of Tom Sprague's
interplanetary rocket-plane, came the seed
of the Red Scourge whose pestilential
hordes would level the whole world to a
barren waste!**

IT was on the twenty-first of June, 1998, that the first successful world-to-world flight was completed by "Daredevil" Tom Sprague, youthful pilot of the Venus-Earth Navigation Company. And it was on the same day that the door was flung open to the most appalling catastrophe our planet had ever known.

Now that we look back, the consummation of interplanetary travel appears of little importance by comparison with the prodigious events it brought in its train. For decades it had been fairly certain that the day was not far off when some intrepid explorer would cross the gulf to Mars or Venus. Experiments in progress ever since the nineteen twenties

had indicated that a rocket-plane, propelled by successive hydrogen explosions, would be capable of leaving the earth's atmosphere and darting through millions of miles of outer space; and the Royle-Brenner researches of the late fifties, followed by Anton Chernowski's celebrated investigations of the sixties and seventies, had resulted in the discharge of unoccupied rockets first to the moon and later as far as Mars and Jupiter. Consequently it was necessary only to work out certain details, such as the perfection of a safe landing mechanism; and in the latter part of 1997, when a flight to Venus was actually begun by Sprague and his fellow flier Hal Rooney, "the Lindberghs of space," even the most pessimistic observers conceded them an even chance of returning alive. Hence the celebration of their return was something in the nature of an expected carnival of rejoicing.

The world has never ceased to regret that, amid the triumphant cheers and cries which greeted the adventurers upon their emergence from the space-car, no thought was given to certain necessary precautions. When Sprague and Rooney steered their machine to a successful landing at Brookings Field in Long Island and flung open the door, red-faced and exultant, the crowd stormed forward, lifted the two men high in air, and bore them jubilantly to a reception hall which had been prepared long in advance, where the notables of many lands stood in waiting. If either explorer attempted to utter a warning, his words were drowned out amid the yells of acclamation, the banging of drums and the blaring of horns; and so the chance was lost to check the danger at its source.

Amid the enthusiasm of that never-to-be-forgotten twenty-first of June, no one took note of certain muddy-brown specks, each no larger than a pinhead, which lay in the dust covering the litter of scientific instruments on the floor of the car. If the airport attendant observed them when he came to clean out the car, nothing could have been further from his mind than the thought that these insignificant-looking dots held the future of mankind. With a stroke of the broom, he swept them into the out-of-doors—and thereby released a greater brood of troubles than did Pandora of

old when she opened her mythical box.

A MONTH went by; two months; three months. The explorers were still being hailed and feted; great audiences were being regaled by their stories of life on Venus; vast new accumulations of facts were being added to the archives of science. And as yet no one suspected the existence of that infection which, incubating in secret, was soon to spread a blight of horror across the planet.

The first premonitions of the Red Scourge (as it was later called) appeared in rumors so fantastic as to be deemed utterly incredible. A housewife in the village of Armstead, Long Island, rumaging among the deep grass in her back yard, claimed to have seen a scarlet-and-black insect about two inches long, with claws like a lobster and a sharp pointed proboscis. A child on a farm near Armstead swore that he had encountered a three-inch insect, also scarlet and black, which shot out sparks of green fire upon his approach. A gardener employed on an estate about half a mile from Brookings Field, received a slashing blow on his right hand while trimming a hedge; he reported that he had felt a shock as if he had touched an electric battery and had seen a flash of crimson, but could not be certain of the nature of his adversary. However, for more than half a day his right arm was paralyzed, and physicians declared themselves to be baffled by the symptoms.

Then other stories began to filter in. From points dozens of miles apart (at first always from Long Island, but later from Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Jersey) tales of the new insects began to spread. It was said that they existed by the scores, even by the hundreds; that they were invariably bright red in color, with streaks and bands of black; that they had long curling scorpion-like tails, claws like crustaceans, and a long pointed beak; while each was from two to four inches in length and had three tiny eyes, varying in hue from blood-red to sultry orange. The strangest fact of all, however—and to this numbers of observers testified—was that they shot out sparks and flashes of light, sometimes green, sometimes bluish, sometimes ominously ruby-hued; and that a low dull rumbling, as of miniature thunders, accompanied these demonstrations.

Thanks to these flaming exhibitions, they early received the name by which they were ever afterwards known: the "Fire-imps."

In the beginning, the world was frankly incredulous even in the face of the multiplying reports. Some declared that the whole affair was but a hoax, a "publicity stunt," an effort of the newspapers to attract readers; others maintained that some tropical insect, such as the "praying mantis," had escaped from a crate of bananas and was giving rise to wild, exaggerated stories. Even the scientists, when consulted, were inclined to say "Pooh, pooh!"; no insect like the reported scarlet-and-black monster had ever been seen before; and therefore, they concluded, no such insect ever would be seen. As yet, unfortunately, no one had had the wisdom to trace any connection between the fire-imp and the flight to Venus.

Even the most hard-headed skepticism, however, cannot hold out in the face of demonstrated facts. It was in late September that Eric Janes, a doughty farmer of Westphalia, Long Island, succeeded in capturing one of the fire-bugs in a cage of glass and steel. The creature, having been lured in by the bait of a live beetle, had fought like seven furies when it had found itself to be trapped, dashing savagely about its cage and spitting out yellow fires; but after a time, perceiving that escape was impossible, it had become more quiet, and had submitted to inspection by a committee of hastily summoned scientists. All, from their first glance, admitted themselves to be utterly baffled; no such animal, they testified, had ever been caught before; nor did it seem to resemble any species of vertebrate or invertebrate known to exist upon the earth.

Not the least of the peculiarities of the captive was that, while it had six legs like an insect, those legs were arranged in two rows of three each, instead of in three rows of two each—a conformation which, it was conceded, was unique among the world's fauna. And when it was dissected (for it seemed to have less endurance than most of its kind, and died after a day or two of imprisonment), its body was found to be nothing less than a zoological miracle. One the outside was a thin layer of some shell-like substance harder than enamel; a substance so tough that it was with difficulty that steel im-

plements made even a dent upon it. When finally this armored layer was pierced, a purple fluid with a nauseous smell spurted out in little jets; and it was believed that this represented the blood of the creature. The interior of the body, also deeply purple in color, was found to consist mainly of two things: the respiratory and digestive tracts, and the nervous system, which was remarkable in that it occupied close to fifty per cent of the space, with a fine network of intricate strands and filaments, all branching toward an enormous ganglion in the rear. This extraordinary nervous development, it was thought, might indicate a correspondingly high intelligence in the fire-imp.

BEFORE long many other specimens of the species had been captured, and had been found to resemble the first individual anatomically, except that the bodies of the females, which were twice as large as the males, were found to be packed with thousands of small brown eggs. In any case, since the creatures bore few affinities to any forms of terrestrial life, their point of origin was soon recognized. Sprague and Rooney, upon being questioned, declared that they vaguely recollected seeing some black-and-scarlet long-tailed insects while on Venus; and they did not deny the possibility that one of the females might have deposited her eggs in the space-car just before its departure. In any case, they believed it to be significant that many of the Venusian insects had their legs in two rows of three each.

But it was not long before the world had ceased speculating as to whence the fire-imp had come. All mere controversial matters were forgotten, while one burning question everywhere sprang up like a challenge: What could be done about the intruder from outer space? For it was rapidly becoming evident that it was something more than a curiosity; that it was a menace of the first order.

Today, when we look back at the cataclysmic sequel, it seems strange that not until the spring of 1999 was the world fully awakened to the peril. All during the autumn and winter months we slumbered, as it were, on the lid of a keg of dynamite, not realizing that the fire-imps, with a fecundity rivalling flies and mosquitoes, had left their eggs by the mil-

lions beneath dead leaves and under stumps, and awaited only the reviving spring warmth in order to begin their depredations.

It was in mid-April that the distress signals began to be heard. The fire-imps, like the driver ants of the tropics, were moving in armies! They were to be seen not singly nor by the dozen, but by the myriad! The experience of a farmer near Valhalla, New York, was typical. One morning, just as he was about to sit down to breakfast with his family, he was aroused by the frantic barking of dogs, accompanied by the screaming of a child. Rushing out of doors, he was amazed to see thousands of black-and-red creatures trooping across the road from the direction of an old apple orchard. Each from two to four inches long, they moved in orderly columns at about the average speed of a walking man; hence the idea of an army on the march inevitably forced itself upon the startled watcher as he saw the long waving tails and the hideous pointed proboscises of the creatures moving as though in unison. Before their advance, the farmer's four-year-old son was fleeing with loud cries; while one of the fire-imps had attached itself to his left arm, which hung limp and powerless. Several hounds, barking savagely, sought to halt the invaders; and one of these, venturing too close, had been attacked by half a dozen of the enemy, which slashed at his legs amid flashes of light and low rumbling thunders. With a terrified yelp, the dog collapsed, and the creatures swarmed over him; and, after a minute, nothing but a gleaming white skeleton remained.

The farmer had barely time to rush back into his house and warn his family when the first of the invaders entered. Without taking time to seize so much as a hat or a coat, he dashed away after his panic-stricken wife and children—and well that he did not delay, for the house was already more than half surrounded, and in a minute the last path of egress would have been closed.

Not all the residents of farms and villages were so fortunate as this particular farmer. Some, unaware of their peril, had awakened from a nap or looked up from the evening paper to find the insidious red-and-black multitudes crawling on all sides of them—and, in such a case, only a timely leap through a win-

dow was likely to prove of much avail. The peculiar difficulty in combating the fire-imps was due to the fact that a single bite would almost instantly paralyze a limb, rendering it incapable of use for many hours; while several bites would paralyze the entire body. Consequently, the mortality rate was alarmingly high. Infants in their cradles were devoured; old persons and invalids, incapable of flight, were pursued and overcome; men and women were surprised at night in bed, and were paralyzed before they were able to flee; family groups were surrounded and exterminated before they could dash to safety; and in one ghastly instance a hundred persons holding a revival meeting at an isolated church were attacked, and more than half of them succumbed during the ensuing stampede.

FARMERS meanwhile were in despair, not only because of the threat to their own lives, but because their horses, sheep, cattle and poultry were being decimated. Attacking by night no less than by day, the little scarlet-and-black terrors would swarm across pastures, and into stables and hen-coops; and by their sheer numbers, and their paralyzing flames, would overwhelm the terrified beasts and birds, of whom they slew so many that the egg and dairy industries in many sections had to be abandoned.

The world by this time, of course, was thoroughly aroused. Yet what it felt was something of the futile horror of a victim caught in a python's folds. No effective defense had been attempted or even proposed. The invader, encased in its adamant armor, was almost invulnerable to ordinary attack; one might stamp upon it and leave it unharmed. Besides, to kill only a few was like trying to stop a downpour by holding up one's hand. Water could not halt it, for it proved to be amphibious; fire had but small effect, since its armor was flame-proof; poison gas left it unaffected, for its chemical reactions were not those of terrestrial animals and it could inhale even the deadly cyanide and live. Rifles or shotguns would have been as useless against it as against a swarm of mosquitoes; while it mocked at barricades, it scaled walls with the agility of an ant, it bit through wire screens as through cheesecloth, it gnawed through wood, and

could be stopped only by solid masses of metal, stone or glass.

Worst of all, it continued to spread, and spread, and spread with the speed of a pestilence, while thousands of scientists worked frenziedly to discover an antidote, to find some means of arresting its breeding or of checking the deadly effects of its bites. But nothing of importance was accomplished. It was found (as had been suspected from the first) that a number of electric cells, a living storage battery like that of the sting-ray or of the electric eel, functioned near the tail of the creature; it was also found that it injected into all wounds a poison like that by which the hunting wasp paralyzes its prey—but this knowledge was of no practical value, since it did not aid to combat the attacks.

To this day we are not certain of the means by which the fire-imp accomplished its widespread distribution; but we have reason to believe that it was capable of swimming stretches of water as wide as Long Island Sound (since some of the creatures were picked up, alive and vigorous, in the middle of that body of water). We have also reason to suppose that the eggs, deposited on airplanes, automobiles, railroad cars and steamships, found rapid transportation to all parts of the civilized world. In any case, the summer of 1999 had not passed before it was reported from points so remote as Lithuania and South Africa, Ceylon, New Zealand, and Brazil. An Indian settlement on the Orinoco had been wiped out by the sudden unexplained appearance of the intruder; the sheep ranchers of Australia raised loud wails to heaven when their flocks were ravaged by the black-and-red marauders; some of the Congo tribesmen had left their villages in precipitate retreat before the advance of the fire-flashing fury. And all the while, in its center of origin, the Eastern United States, farms were being depopulated, villages deserted, and men and animals slain while the intruders spread out and multiplied, swiftly, inexorably, like a blight, like a miasma, like the advancing crest of doom.

But not until the late fall of 1999 did it launch forth upon the second and most deadly phase of its assaults.

From time to time before this, observers had noted bulb-like protuberances on the backs of some of the fire-

imps; but nothing had been thought of these bulges, and no one had paid much attention to the occasional rumors that the creatures were sprouting wings. It was in early November, on an unseasonably warm "Indian summer" day, that a broker in lower Manhattan flung open his window on the forty-sixth story of the Amalgamated Life Tower, and was astonished to see several black-and-red projectiles come shooting into his room. On examination, they proved to be fire-imps; and what was particularly alarming was that they darted through the air with a loud whirring, like angry bumble bees, and displayed wings as long as those of large dragon flies. The unfortunate broker, unable to flee in time, was attacked on the arms, legs and face and paralyzed before help could be summoned.

THIS episode, although a minor one by comparison with thousands that were to follow, was long to be remembered as ominous in two respects. First it showed that, just as tadpoles develop legs and take to the land, so the fire-imps could sprout wings and take to the air. And, secondly, it marked their first invasion of the cities. Hitherto they had confined themselves to the farms and country towns; and the dwellers in the great metropolitan centers, secure behind their walls, had congratulated themselves that they were immune from molestation. But thenceforth all was to be changed. It was as if the fire-imps, as an alternative to hibernating in the country, had decided to take to the cities during the cold weather. That assault upon the Manhattan broker was but the first of a veritable avalanche of attacks. As if at a preconcerted signal, the insects were seen swarming through the air one day in late November, covering the sun in clouds so dense as to remind one of the approach of a thunder storm. Straight toward the towers of Greater New York they flew from several directions—from the New Jersey marshes, from the plains of Long Island, and from the hill-lands of Westchester County and of Connecticut. It was as if they acted under intelligent command! And no army in all history was more to be dreaded than these flying legions of the fire-imps.

Forewarned of their coming barely in time, the startled Gothamites had rushed

indoors and flung down all windows. The city thoroughfares were deserted; pedestrians had vanished; private cars, busses and trunks had been abandoned on the curbs and in the middle of the streets. When the fire-imps arrived, they found no victim awaiting them other than an occasional stray dog and cat, and one or two lame beggars who had not been able to dash to safety. The terrified inhabitants, looking out through tightly sealed windows, saw the red-and-black furies crawling along their walls and on the outside of the window-panes; saw them flying down the empty streets in orderly formation, like flocks of sinister birds. New York was under siege! Its population was helplessly on the defensive!

Nor was it long before the attackers, with diabolical ingenuity, began the actual invasion of the buildings. Some slid through cracks into basements; some entered by means of drain-pipes; some crawled down chimneys; some burrowed through the wood of window sills; some descended from the roofs, by means of stairways inadvertently left open; some climbed in through subway entrances; some worked their way in by methods that we still have not fully penetrated. In any case, it was not twenty-four hours before there were fire-imps in almost every building in Manhattan.

Consequently, the exodus from the city began. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to call it the stampede from the city. The inhabitants, defenseless against the myriads of intruders, had no refuge except in flight. Many, even as they fled, were attacked and paralyzed by the flying demons; others, more fortunate, managed to reach the safety of a closed airplane or automobile and so to speed away from the imperiled metropolis. Horrible beyond all words were the scenes as millions of men, women and children rushed from the stricken city; no one will ever know how many were crushed beneath the feet of panic-smitten mobs; how many died in duels for a seat in a car; how many were devoured by the insects, which, shooting out sparks of green and crimson fire, buzzed and hissed everywhere like some infernal war-machine. The rout of the Gothamites was complete; and after two days, if any human being survived in the city, it was some recluse who sat caged behind sealed walls, unable to flee, and tremblingly

awaiting the inexorable.

The governor of the State, in the emergency, had called out the militia—which was sent howling in retreat before the black-and-scarlet flying goblins. The President of the United States, in his turn, dispatched an army corps to the scene—with the result that many a good soldier was lost to the country; for nothing less stout than a Medieval suit of mail would have been able to hold off the paralyzing attacks. Realizing that it was impossible to do anything effective against the multitudes of the foe, the troops ended by executing a frantic about-face.

NEW YORK was now exclusively in possession of the fire-imps, which made their nests in fashionable salons and luxurious offices, while burrowing into kitchens and store-rooms and satisfying their omnivorous appetites not only with the supplies of bread and meat which they ransacked, but at the expense of costly rugs and draperies, linens, silks and furs.

Disasters, they say, rarely strike singly. At that cataclysmic moment, when the world was stunned by the catastrophe and relief agencies struggled in vain to care for the refugees, it was reported that similar assaults were being made against other cities. Boston, New Haven and Philadelphia had all been invaded by the swarming terrors! And in each of these centers the same story was repeated—a story of horror, flight, privation, and death. Was there to be no end to the affliction? Would the fire-imps spread until they had captured every city in the United States—and in the civilized world? Were they destined to be the rulers of the earth? Had mankind at last met its match, and was it doomed to extermination beneath the jaws of the enemy from Venus?

Such were the questions that millions asked in those dark days that ushered in the year 2000. And everywhere men shook their heads sadly, and muttered pessimistic predictions as they read of each new advance of the Red Scourge. Little did anyone imagine that, while scientists pondered in vain and laboratory workers unavailingly tested poisons and explosives, two doughty investigators had already trailed down the desperately needed remedy.

Amid the universal consternation at the spread of the fire-imp, the world had ceased to give much thought to Tom Sprague, the unwitting cause of all the trouble. In the spring of 1999 he had set off on his second flight to Venus; and it was late winter of the following year when he returned. But all during the months of his stay on our neighbor planet, he and his companion Hal Rooney were engaged in an occupation that would have brought a stare of wonder to the eyes of their friends on earth, could they have seen. Almost all their time was spent in jungle thickets and byways, where they tracked down the gaudy yellow, purple and indigo-blue insects that buzzed and crawled amid the dense reddish-green foliage. It was some time before they had found any of the scarlet-and-black creatures that they particularly sought; and, even after they had seen the desired species, it was long before they had completed the observations which they had come so far to make.

But when in early December (as time is reckoned on our planet) they turned their faces earthward once more, they were smiling in mutual self-congratulation; and their space-car carried a freight which they would not have exchanged for all the fabled wealth of the Indies. Months later, having successfully finished the return flight and landed at an obscure Maryland airport, they were rushed by automobile to Washington, where, though the hour was past midnight, they were given an immediate audience at the White House.

The face of President Lawrence Burke, as he came forth to receive his visitors, was seamed and furrowed with tragic lines. His gray eyes were deeply sunken, like those of a man who has not slept for days; his thin hands trembled with an irrepressible agitation.

"Well," he demanded, without taking time for a formal greeting, "what have you accomplished? The radio, I believe, has kept you informed of progress here. Cleveland has been the latest city taken by those damnable insects. Detroit and Chicago are shuddering, knowing their turn will come next. Yet, in the face of all that, your messages tell us you believe you have a remedy."

"I believe we have, sir," declared Sprague, pointing to a large covered box

which he had carried in with him. "You know what my theory was from the first. On Venus we had not seen many of the fire-imps; therefore we concluded that there was some natural enemy to check their spread. Here, however, the natural enemy did not exist, and they multiplied without stint. But if their enemy could be found, and brought to this planet—"

"Come, come, get to the point!" broke in the President, with an impatient gesture toward a map on the wall, whereon the parts of the United States conquered by the invaders had been marked in great splashes of red.

"WELL, the point is simply this!" stated the space-flier, as he ripped off the covering of his package and brought to light an iron and glass cage, in which stalked two insects each about five inches long. The bodies of these creatures were deep orange, splashed with green spots and stripes; they each had three baleful-looking ruby eyes, a long curved tail, and a beak-like proboscis.

"Damnation!" swore President Burke, losing the dignity to be expected of one in high office; while the imprisoned insects darted to the front of their cage and shot miniature blue lightnings in his direction. "Do you mean to say you've traveled a hundred million miles just for this?"

"Yes, Sir," acknowledged Sprague, calmly. "Let me explain—"

"Why, they're nothing but damned fire-imps!" thundered the President. "You accursed imbeciles! Haven't we got enough of them already?"

From the way the official glared at Sprague and Rooney, it was evident that he feared the flight to Venus had worked havoc with their minds.

"They're fire-imps—but of a different species," pointed out Sprague. "Have you got any of the regular kind at hand?"

"Yes, a few billion too many! There are some under observation now in the laboratories," replied the President, in the manner of one who would humor a lunatic.

He tapped a bell on his desk; and, a moment later, a night watchman appeared. "Go over to the biological laboratory and get me a few fire-imps," he ordered. "You'll find some one working there day and night."

A few minutes later the caged fire-imps, hissing and shooting out green sparks, were brought into the room.

"Now let's introduce some of these black-and-red ones to the orange-and-green species," suggested Sprague.

With some difficulty, two black-and-red insects were forced into the cage with the new arrivals from Venus.

Instantly—with such suddenness that the eye could not follow the movements—the green-and-orange insects had sprung upon their kindred. There was a flashing of crimson and yellow fires, a rumbling of low thunders, and a convulsive threshing and writhing, and both of the black-and-red furies lay motionless, with their victorious foes on top of them in a greedy cannibalistic repast.

"You see!" exclaimed Sprague, triumphantly.

"They're the natural enemies of the red-and-black species!" put in Rooney. "We've brought their eggs—thousands of them, hundreds of thousands, at a low temperature preventing them from hatching till we're ready—"

President Burke groaned in reply, and clasped his hands above his forehead, more than ever convinced of the insanity of his visitors. "I fail to see what it's going to gain us," he returned, dismally, "to wipe out one species of fire-imp and get an even more horrible species in exchange."

There was a confident smile on Sprague's face as he answered, "Then let's try another experiment, sir. Let's put ten or twelve black-and-red fire-imps into the cage with the newcomers."

"Don't see where that's going to get us!" growled the President.

Nevertheless, the two orange-and-green creatures were forced into a cage containing a dozen of their smaller relatives. This time it was the red-and-black creatures that made the attack. Once more there was a flashing of fires, crimson, green, and blue a low muttering of thunder and a furious threshing. It was several minutes before the exhibition was over—and, when finally peace was restored, fourteen six-legged forms lay scattered about the cage, torn and motionless, and dyed in their own purple life-fluid.

A light came into the President's eyes as he observed this spectacle. "I see! I see!" he ejaculated, warmly. "Mr.

Sprague and Mr. Rooney, I congratulate you! Your discovery may yet save the human race!"

But months must pass before it would be known if the rescuing hand had not come too late. Meanwhile, in glass cages throughout the country, hundreds of thousands of minute grayish eggs were being incubated, to give rise to green-and-orange insects which grew with great rapidity and reached their own egg-laying stage after a few weeks.

BUT though everything possible was done to multiply the new importation from Venus, there were moments when it looked as if the game had already been lost. The black-and-scarlet species, still spreading with incredible rapidity, had already reached Denver by mid-summer of 2000; while in the north it had driven out the inhabitants of Winnipeg and Calgary, and in the south it had depopulated El Paso and New Orleans. Abroad, it had been almost equally successful; London had had to be abandoned, Berlin was a city of the dead, and Paris was in imminent danger; Tokio shuddered with terror, the people of Vienna, Prague and Moscow were in flight, and Rome had been taken by a horde more terrible than the barbarian hosts of old. For the first time in centuries, the nations of the earth, forgetting feuds and animosities, were working together against a common foe—a foe against which all their efforts seemed likely to prove unavailing.

Then, in that day of terror and despair, when millions had perished and hundreds of millions were suffering privation and hunger; the green-and-orange insects were released—released by the millions from the breeding stations where they had been sedulously cultivated. It was feared at first that their numbers would not be sufficient to cope with the uncountable myriads of their red-and-black foes; and, indeed, for the first month or two, the results remained in doubt. In some districts the scourge was declared to be receding, but in other sections it was still spreading; and not until 2001 was already old could the world, grown sceptical and pessimistic, be convinced of the happy truth. The fire-imp was destroying itself! The green-and-orange species was exterminating the other variety, by which in turn

it was being exterminated! A million of the former, in any region, could be relied on to annihilate ten million of the latter, although they would give their own lives in the process. Cities which for months had known no life except that of the crawling and flying red-and-black furies, were rescued for human occupancy by the green-and-orange creatures. To be sure, the lost territory was recaptured but slowly; the invasion had been like a mighty flood, which could be expected to recede only gradually leaving vast areas of ruin in its wake; but, the tide having been turned, the ultimate issue was now assured.

Today, in the good year 2111, we have reconquered every city occupied by the fire-imps, and retaken every bit of stricken farm-land. The earth's population is estimated to have dwindled by a hundred million; and it will be a generation yet before we have recovered from the economic loss and the shock and horror of

the invasion. The fire-imp has not been wholly eliminated; some few members of the species are still being encountered in forests, swamps and thickets. But the green-and-orange tribe and the black-and-red variety continue their deadly enmity; and each is strong enough to prevent the other from becoming much of a menace. Never would we have imagined that race suicide and cannibalism could be so important in the economy of nature!

Meanwhile, though Sprague and Rooney are universally honored as the saviors of mankind, no further world-to-world flights have been attempted. The law of every nation during the past eleven years, has forbidden all such experiments; for it is feared that some new pestilence might be brought down from the heavens, and it is not known whether mankind would again be able to recover so providentially as it did from the ravages of the Red Scourge.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 52

1. The distance of a star with a *parallax* of one *sec-ond* (5 points); $3\frac{1}{4}$ (3.274) light years, or about 19 trillion miles (5 points for either figure).

2. Alpha proxima is slightly closer than Alpha Centauri (4 points for either); 4.3 light years distant (4 points — "approximately 4 light years" is acceptable).

3. The mean distance from the Earth to the Sun (5 points); 92,900,000 miles (3 points—answer acceptable if within 100,000 miles).

4. Metaplastm is matter formed in the cell as a by-product of the chemical processes essential to living. Cytoplasm, the entire cell substance, less metaplastm, leaves protoplasm, the genuine living matter. (5 points for each term correctly explained).

5. Double mean distance to Sun and multiply by Pi (π) to get circumference of Earth's orbital path, and divide by number of seconds in year (5 points); 18.5 miles per second (5 points between 18.2 and 19.0).

6. Perihelion is the point in the orbit of a planet or comet where it is nearest the Sun and aphelion is the point farthest from the Sun. (5 points.)

7. A meteoroid is a small mass of matter moving through space; when it strikes the atmosphere, producing a luminous phenomenon, it becomes a meteor; if it falls upon the Earth, it is called a meteorite. (3 points for each term correctly explained.)

8. Anabolism is the process by which simple and stable food is built up into the complex and unstable living matter within a cell or organism; catabolism is the process by which living matter is broken down into less complex and more stable substance; metabolism is the combination of the anabolic and catabolic processes. (4 points for each term correctly explained.)

9. A protist is a minute unicellular organism, neither plant nor animal but from which both may have evolved (5 points); a protein is an albuminous compound in nearly all animal and vegetable organisms. (3 points.)

10. (1) Jupiter, 86,700 miles; (2) Saturn, 72,500; (3) Neptune, 33,000; (4) Uranus, 32,000; (5) Pluto, 10,000. (1 point for each planet given correct rank; 2 points for each diameter given within 5 per cent.)

*Mason and lovely Alasa fought
madly against Greddar Klon's
insensate slaves*



CHAPTER I

THE GREEN MONOLITHS

KENT MASON stumbled to the top of the ridge, staring about him with sun-swollen eyes. His cracked lips twisted wryly as he viewed the endless wilderness of rock, the death-trap of the Arabian desert, dimmed now by driving gusts of icy rain. In the valley below him two pinnacles of rock towered, and as Mason stared at them a curious expression crept over his sunburned face. He recognized those great obelisks, and, recognizing them, knew that his search and his life would end almost simultaneously. For before him lay the fabulous twin towers of the lost city of Al Bokr, ancient metropolis of lost wisdom, City of Science!

Two months ago an expedition has set out from the port of Merbat to search for Al Bokr, and for two months had been vainly pushing through the arid wastes that the Arabs call the Rubh el Khali. Old Doctor Cordell, the leader of the expedition, had pinned his hopes on legends, obscure hints on archaic shards—but mostly upon a tablet which had been recently uncovered on the site of primal Ur, the import of which was that a remarkable state of civilization had been attained in the "Forbidden City."

According to the inscription, Al Bokr had been merely a little-visited town in the Great Desert, until suddenly, inexplicably, fantastically advanced arts and sciences began to flourish there. But this perfection of science died almost as swiftly as it had been born, for a reason

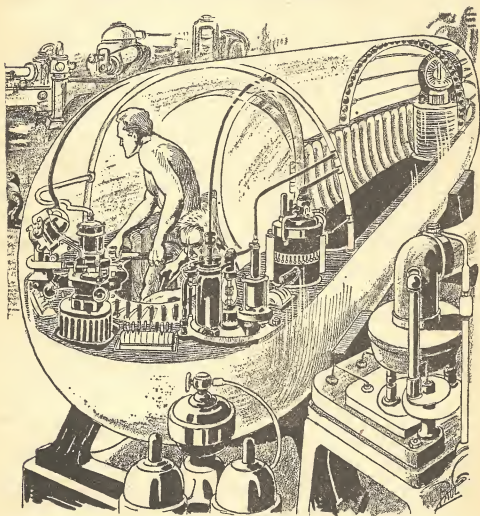
Hurled by unleashed atomic force into time, Kent Mason's sole before Rome's birth—and returning to the year 1939 A.D., was

THE TIME TRAP

by HENRY KUTTNER

Author of "Avengers of Space," etc.

STARTLING BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL OF MEN AND WOMEN DRAWN FROM TIME-SECTORS FIVE HUNDRED CENTURIES APART AND HURLED INTO CIVILIZATION'S DAWN-ERA!



that was either not known or not set down; and the great days of Al Bekr were over forever. It was, in fact, a compressed version of the Atlantean legend—an advanced, scientific culture destroyed by some mysterious doom.

Mason, the archeologist of the party, was also the youngest. Now, through the

irony of fate, he had accomplished, unguided and lost, what his colleagues had despaired of doing. Doctor Cordell had decided to give up the search and return to Merbat, and when Mason, determined to investigate a little-known mountain range near by, had insisted on one last try, Cordell had refused to permit it.

chance of saving lovely Alasa—who ruled a thousand years to give Greddar Klon, the Time-Master, his brain!

That morning Mason slipped away from camp, taking a speedy camel, thinking he could reach the mountains and rejoin the slow-traveling party in a day or two at the most. But his plans had miscarried. The camel had fallen, breaking its leg. The compass had been smashed, and for three days Mason had been lost in this desolate, sun-baked inferno. The water had not lasted long. He had shot a vulture and forced himself to eat the tough, stringy meat; then, during his nearly delirious wanderings, Mason had lost his revolver. Now, hollow-eyed and exhausted, he saw beneath him Al Bekr, City of Science!

The centuries had left little of the fabled metropolis. Two giant pinnacles protruding from the drifted sand, a riven block half buried here and there. That was all. Grim and desolate in the drenching rain, the valley lay lifeless and silent below. Yet there would be shelter there, and the storm was momentarily growing fiercer. There are few storms in the Rubh el Khali, but they are cataclysmic in their fury. Lightning forked above Mason.

HE made his way down the slope, staggering in his weakness. The tumbled fragments of masonry seemed to increase in size as he drew nearer. The city in its heyday must have been an awe-inspiring sight.

Thunder snarled behind the hills. The two obelisks were not far apart, and provided some shelter. Mason collapsed against one of them. He breathed a great sigh of relief, let his aching muscles relax. Then, suddenly, his lean face was alight with interest. The surface of the monolith against which he leaned was not stone. Rough, worn, pitted with the teeth of the ages, it was nevertheless unmistakably metal!

But what race of people could have reared these tremendous spires, nearly forty feet high? The thing was impossible. Mason examined the texture of the metal, frowning. He did not recognize it. Hard and rough-grained, with a peculiar greenish tinge, it was apparently some unfamiliar alloy.

Ominously thunder growled overhead. Then without warning lightning struck. Like an incandescent white-hot sword it raced down the skies, enveloping the twin spires in blinding brilliance. Mason felt

himself lifted, flung aside. He had a momentary glimpse of a sheet of roaring, flashing flame playing between the two pinnacles. There was a moment of unendurable tension, as though the air was becoming surcharged with electricity. Then there was wrenching agony that tore at the fibre of Mason's being, agony such that he shrieked aloud and knew that no sound came from his paralyzed lips. He felt a surge of incredibly swift movement. Blackness took him, blackness, and vertigo, and then quickly the shadow fled back and vanished. Blazing light flared into his eyes.

The desolate valley of Al Bekr—was gone! Gone the drenching rain, the growling of thunder overhead, the wet sand beneath his body! He lay on his back, staring up with amazed eyes at a tremendously high roof, lit with strange green brilliance. And towering up toward that high-arched ceiling were—the monoliths!

The twin towers—but changed! Gone were the scars and pits of centuries of erosion. Their surfaces were smooth, glistening with greenish sheen, and beyond them marched row upon row of fantastic machines, shining and brilliant in the strange light. Mason had never seen such machinery, could only guess at the purposes of oddly-shaped pistons, wheels, tubes. The room was wide, circular, paved and walled with white stone. In the walls at intervals were set bars of some greenish substance that glowed with cold flame.

Mason put out a hand, touched the smooth surface of the green monolith beside him. The touch was reassuring. He wasn't mad, he told himself desperately. The lightning stroke must have unleashed some undreamed-of power in the mysterious towers, wrought some astounding change which as yet he could not understand. He got slowly to his feet, half expecting the incredible scene to shift and change to the rain-drenched desert valley.

Behind him a voice barked a deep-toned question.

Mason turned quickly. A man stood near, a swarthy, stock figure in loin-cloth and sandals; startlingly pale blue eyes set in a harsh, weather-beaten face of seamed tan leather glared at him. A great beak of a nose jutted over the thin-lipped mouth. Again the man snarled

his question.

Madness! For he spoke the ancient, forgotten Semite tongue, the purest form of the root-language of Arabic, that had not been used save among scholars for almost four thousand years! Some faint inkling of the truth sent the blood dropping from Mason's head. He braced himself, searched his memory gropingly. He knew the root-language. . . .

"I come—from a distant land," Mason said slowly, tentatively, eyeing the great scimitar the warrior carried.

"None may enter this city," the other responded, ferine eyes gleaming. "The Master permits none to enter Al Bekr. Or to leave!"

Al Bekr! Mason cast a swift glance around. Was time, after all, not the changeless thing science had thought it? Had he been flung back into an incredibly distant past by some strange power in the lightning-riven monoliths? Yet these machines, the very masonry beneath his feet, bespoke not the past but the powers of a distant future.

MASON eyed the warrior, felt a tug of recognition pull at his mind. He said, "Al Bekr is not your home."

The man grunted. "It takes no magic to know that. I am a Sumerian."

Mason's jaw dropped. A Sumerian! That mysterious, archaic people whose civilization had existed in the Euphrates-Tigris valleys long before the Semites had come conquering. The warrior, suddenly suspicious, moved forward, his movements catlike, the gleaming scimitar menacing. Swiftly Mason said, "I mean no harm. By El-lil—I swear it!"

The Sumerian's eyes widened. He stared. "El-lil? You swear by—"

Mason nodded. He knew the reverence in which the Sumerians had held the name of their chief god. "I've no wish to be your enemy," he said. A surge of weakness struck him, the culminations of three days and nights in the terrible Rubh el Khali. Mason felt his muscles relaxing, tried vainly to keep his balance while a veil of blackness rushed up to overwhelm him.

The Sumerian sprang forward, put a great arm about Mason's shoulders, supporting him. The warrior thrust his scimitar back into its scabbard, caught Mason in his arms as though the archaeologist were a child, lifted him.

The Sumerian bellowed an oath. "Now by Baal and all the other milk-and-water gods of the north," he concluded, "I fight no man who swears by El-lil!"

Dimly Mason was conscious of being swung across a brawny shoulder, carried through interminable green-lit corridors. He was too weak to resist. At last he was deposited lightly on a mound of furs. He felt liquid trickling between his lips, clutched at a flask the warrior held, and lifted it. Water. . . no, not water, though the liquor was tasteless and very cold. Energy seemed to trickle through every fibre of Mason's parched body with the fluid. He drained the flask, put it aside.

His weakness had gone. He sat up, staring about the room—bare, stone-walled, carpeted with furs. The Sumerian put down the flask with a ruefully thirsty glance. "Now who are you?" he growled. "Nobody in this cursed land knows of El-lil. And you are no man of Sumer."

Mason chose his words carefully. "I come from a distant land," he said. "A land far to the west, where El-lil's fame has traveled. How I came here—I don't know."

"The Master would know. How are you named?"

"Mason."

"Ma-zhon." He rolled the syllables upon his tongue, giving them a curiously guttural sound. "And I—well, call me Erech. I was born in the city of Erech, and sometimes it isn't wise for men to give their own names. If I ever leave this city, it would not be well for men to know that I once served Greddar Klon." The Sumerian's harsh face darkened, and he sent a suspicious glance toward Mason. "You know the Master?"

Before Mason could answer a thudding sounded beyond the door. He was startled at the expression that flashed over Erech's face, in which fear and resentment were strangely mingled. The door opened.

Framed in the portal stool—a metal man! Seven feet tall, barrel-bodied, with three jointed legs of silvery metal ending in flat, broad metal plates, the thing stood there—watching! Rubbery, tentacular arms dangled loosely; the head was a metal sphere, incongruously small atop that bulky body, featureless save for a multiple-faceted eye. The robot stared.

The Sumerian did not move. Mason saw the sinews of his right hand crawl beneath the skin. Imperceptibly the hand edged toward the hilt of the scimitar.

THE robot spoke, in a flat, toneless voice. "The Master summons you. Come at once."

It turned, retreated. The door shut silently. With a muttered oath Erech relaxed on the furs.

"What — what was that?" Mason asked, feeling a nameless terror stirring within him. The metal creature had seemed alive!

"One of the Master's servants," said the Sumerian, getting to his feet. "One of those he created. Powerful is the Master!" Irony tinged his tone.

"Well, I must go," he went on. "You wait here. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Didn't that robot see me?" Mason asked uneasily. Erech shrugged.

"El-il knows! Sometimes they see nothing—sometimes everything. I'll be back soon enough, and we'll find a hiding-place for you. There's no time now."

He hurried out, and Mason stared at the closed door, trying to integrate his thoughts. Unconsciously for the last quarter-hour he had been trying to convince himself that this was a dream, a hallucination born of delirium. But he knew this was not so. The reality of this strange city was clear enough, and Mason was young enough to realize how elastic are the boundaries of known science. Time was not fixed, unchangeable. In theory it would be possible to travel into the future or the past. And if in theory—why not in fact?

Strange, yes, and incredible and terrifying—but not impossible. Furtively Mason ran his hand over the smooth surface of the metal wall behind him, smoothed the furs on which he sat. He felt a desperate longing for a cigarette.

There were so many things unexplained! This fantastic city, ruled by a mysterious Master of whom the Sumerian was seemingly terrified. That tied in with the known legends, but it explained woefully little. And it did not tell Mason what he most wanted to know: whether he was among enemies or friends.

A noise in the corridor brought Mason alertly to his feet. Some vague impulse

made him open the door, peering out. A robot was advancing along the passage, still almost thirty feet away, and Mason quickly closed the door again, flattening himself against the wall beside it. The creature might pass by, but there was no assurance of that.

The footsteps stopped. The door opened under the pressure of a metallic tentacle. Flattened against the wall Mason saw, from the corner of his eye, the monstrous looming form of the robot moving forward. It had not yet seen him.

The creature crossed the threshold and abruptly halted, as though realizing Mason's proximity. But the man had already sprung forward, thrusting at the robot with his shoulder, attempting to squeeze past into the corridor. He had not realized the frightful power of the thing.

Even caught off balance, the robot was immensely strong. It wheeled, and the arm-tentacles gripped Mason, pulled him back. He tried vainly to fight free.

The creature held him effortlessly, and one coiling limb slid out to close the door. That done, the robot stumped forward into the room, dragging Mason with it, ignoring the man's struggles. The faceted eye glared passionlessly down.

Then Mason caught sight of the empty flask he had drained, that had been flung aside carelessly by the Sumerian. It was lying within easy reach, and with a quick lunge he snatched it up, his fingers tightening about the neck. The robot's eye was not high to reach—and Mason's arm curved in a swift arc, sent the bottle smashing viciously forward.

Glass showered his face painfully. He put all his strength in a frantic attempt to wriggle free, managed to tear the last tentacle from its anchorage about his waist. The robot blundered forward, smashing against the wall. Its eye was shattered, Mason saw; it was blind.

SWIFTLY he gained the door, crept out quietly into the corridor. Behind him came a thunderous crashing as the robot pounded about the room, reducing it to pulped wreckage. Mason glanced around. The passage was empty. He could not wait here for Erech; if one robot had been sent, there would be others. Choosing a direction at random,

Mason moved cautiously to the left. The corridor was broken at intervals by doors, but he did not try them, fearing to alarm some inhabitant of the city.

But he was given no choice. The distant pounding of feet came mechanically, running toward him, and Mason guessed that additional robots were arriving. A turn in the passage hid them from his sight. He hesitated. Perhaps the ruler of Al Bekr—whoever directed the metal men—was not an enemy. The robot had not actually attacked him—it had merely tried to subdue and capture. If he submitted peacefully—

But as the hurrying feet came closer a wave of cold horror chilled Mason, and on impulse he opened the nearest door and slipped through, closing the panel behind him. His eyes examined the room as he heard the robots race past. And, almost, Mason cried out in amazement, as, for the first time, he saw the woman who was called Nirvor — the Silver Priestess!

CHAPTER II

THE WOMAN OUT OF TIME

MASON stood on a low balcony, from which a sloping ramp led down to a broad, low-ceilinged room, hazy and perfumed with musky incense. Furs and rugs carpeted the floor. Below him, in the center of the chamber, was an altar, low and square, from which a flower of flame blossomed. Gleaming with cold silver radiance, it cast flickering gleams over the two huge beasts that stood beside the altar—two leopards, stretched in sinuous ease.

One leopard of polished ebony—

One white as the fabled gates of ivory through which, legends say, evil dreams pour from the Hell-city Dis to torment men's sleep—

Two leopards, brilliant green eyes intent on the woman who crouched before the flaming altar, a woman such as Mason had never seen before!

She was like a silver statue, exquisitely moulded, her slender body half revealed by a lacy silken robe of black. Long unbound hair, moon-silver, drifted about her ivory shoulders. Her face Mason could not see; the woman knelt before

the altar, and her voice, murmuring sorcerous music, whispered words in a tongue completely unfamiliar to the man.

And the pale fires seethed up coldly, whispering. The leopards watched unmoving. The woman's voice rose to a shrill, high keening.

"*Ohé, ohé!*" She spoke in the Semite tongue now, and Mason understood the words. "My city and my people and my kingdom! Ruined and fallen, and the beasts of the forest walk in the lonely streets of Corinoor. . . *ohé!*" The woman mourned, her hair falling loose about her face. With a sudden gesture she sprang erect, ripped her robe in tattered shreds from her body. For a moment her nude form was silhouetted against the milky fires, and Mason caught his breath at sight of the woman's undraped loveliness, the sleek perfection of limbs and torso, lithe as the forms of the watching leopards. Then the woman crouched down in utter self-abasement before the altar, her hands outstretched in appeal.

"Soon, let it be soon," her voice sobbed. "Let the Master succeed and bring power again to Corinoor. . . dead and lovely Corinoor. I, queen and priestess of Corinoor, ask this of you like the meanest slave, naked and abased. . . Selene, mighty Selene, turn your face again toward my people!"

Silence, and the soft whisper of the moon-fires. The leopards were statue-still. Their green eyes dwelt enigmatically on the woman.

Mason felt a queer chill touch him. Once more the eerie mystery of this haunted city shadowed him. He made a swift involuntary movement; one of the leopards coughed, sprang up on alert feet. The white leopard remained quiet, but the black one stalked forward, eyes intent on Mason. And there was something disturbingly strange about those eyes, the man realized—an intelligence that was more than a beast should possess.

The woman leaped up in one quick movement, stood staring, red lips parted. Mason felt his throat tighten at sight of her loveliness. Her eyes were deep pools of jet. And, perhaps, she read something of Mason's undisguised admiration, for the lips curved in a smile, and the low voice called a command.

"Bokya! To me!"

The black leopard halted, one paw lifted. Growling softly, it returned to the woman's side. She made a peremptory gesture.

Obedying, Mason walked forward down the ramp. His heart was thudding madly as he drew closer to the woman's pale beauty, and a pulse of passion was beating in his temples. She was Aphrodite, goddess of love and all delight—

Something he read in her eyes made Mason halt.

Beauty was there, yes. But there was something else, something coldly alien and dreadful, that seemed to lurk hidden in those cryptic depths, a quality of soullessness that sent a shock of repulsion tingling through Mason. But before he could speak a thudding of racing feet sounded near by.

IN Mason's apprehensive glance at the door the woman read something of the truth. For a long moment she stood silent; then—

"In here," she whispered in Semite. "Make no sound!"

She bent, touched the altar. The pale fires died. The altar was a bare block of dark stone. At the woman's urging Mason mounted upon it hesitantly, stood rigid. Then, abruptly regretting his move, he made as though to leap down.

He was too late. The moon-flames sprang up, crackling softly. All around Mason now was a wall of silver fire, hiding the woman and all else from his eyes. Oddly there was no perceptible heat. Rather, a queer chill seemed to emanate from the weird flames. Slowly Mason relaxed, realizing that he was in no immediate danger. Yet why had the woman helped him?

Voices came from beyond the altar. Someone he could not see was speaking—questioning, demanding. The woman's voice answered. Then, for a time there was silence.

Again the moon-flames died. The room was empty, save for the leopards and the woman. She had cast a robe of white fur about her shoulders. Laughing a little, she beckoned Mason.

"One of the Master's servants," she said. "He was searching for you. I sent him away. You're safe—for a while, at least."

Mason got down from the altar, with a wary glance at the leopards. But, save

for a growl or two, they paid him no heed. He came close to the woman, said in Semite:

"You have my thanks, O goddess who rules men's hearts."

Her face clouded at the flowery phrase. "Do not speak of goddesses. I worship one goddess—and I have fear of her, but no love. Well—what is your name?"

"Mason."

"Mason—yes. And I am Nirvor. I do not think you have been in Al Bekr long, eh?"

"Half an hour at most. You're the first human being I've seen, except—" Some indefinable instinct of caution made Mason stop before he mentioned the Sumerian. Nirvor's jet eyes grew keen.

"Except—?"

"The robots."

The woman smiled slightly. "What year do you come from?"

Mason caught his breath. This confirmed his wild guesses. The power of the twin monoliths had flung him into time—as he had thought. Fighting back his questions, he said as calmly as he could, "1939." And added, as an afterthought, "A. D."

"Then—as you would reckon it—I come from 2150, long in your future. I was caught by the time trap, as you were, and drawn back to this dawn-era before Egypt or Rome ever sprang from the dust. And here, in long-forgotten Al Bekr, I found—the Master."

Nirvor watched, but Mason made no sign. She said, "You have not seen him yet?"

"No. Who is he?"

"He is from the future—my future as well as yours. Five thousand years later than your time-sector—nearly ten thousand years from now, in earth's dusk. He built the time projector, and with its aid traveled back to this almost prehistoric city. The projector was wrecked, but the Master determined to rebuild it. He conquered Al Bekr, and with the robots he made, turned it into a city of science. Then he set to work to repair the projector."

"How did you get here?" Mason asked. "I don't see—"

"The twin monoliths have in them atomic power, and when this is released, the time-warped is set in operation. Any object within their field of force is hurled into time. This is true now, or a

million years from now. Mason, the green time-towers that the Master builds now will stand in this valley when Al Bekr is a lifeless wilderness. They will stand in your day, and they will stand in mine, and through the ages, holding within them the power of time travel. Once in a thousand years, perhaps, a human being will be within range of the towers when the force is released, perhaps by lightning, as it was when I was captured. My caravan had camped beneath the palms of an oasis in the valley of Al Bekr, and I, wandering in the storm, sleepless, was between the green towers when lightning struck. I was drawn back through time to the period in which the projector first existed—now, when the Master rules Al Bekr."

MASON'S mind was busy with this explanation. He said, "Are we the only ones who have been captured by the monoliths?"

"You and I, and the Master—and one other. He—" Nirvor hesitated. "We shall not speak of him." She sank down beside the altar, stretching like a cat. The leopards watched silently. Nirvor eyed Mason from half-lowered lids, pale ash-blonde lashes sweeping her cheeks.

"It has been lonely here," she said. "Sit down, Mason."

He obeyed. The woman went on.

"Long and long have I waited. The Master has promised to return me to my own time, to aid me in rebuilding my dead city, marble Corinoor. But in the meantime I wait among these barbarians—I wait, and I worship Selene, and my leopards guard me . . . they, too, were captured by the time-towers when I was." A slim hand caressed the furry jaw of the black beast. From half-closed eyes it peered at her, growling softly.

"They are wise, Mason—Bokya and Valesta. Long before Corinoor fell our scientists had evolved certain creatures, and the sacred leopards were wisest of all. Remember, Mason—Bokya and Valesta are very wise. . . ."

With a lithe movement Nirvor moved close to Mason. She whispered, "But I grow tired of wisdom. I am—woman."

Slim arms stole about Mason's neck. Nirvor's perfumed breath was warm in the man's nostrils, a perfumed madness that mounted headily to his brain. His throat was dry and clamped.

He bent his head, pressed his lips against Nirvor's scarlet ones. When he drew back he was trembling a little.

"Mason," the woman whispered, "Her eyes met and locked with the man's. And, for the second time, Mason saw something alien in them."

A cold, cruel, distant something that made him draw back involuntarily, appalled by the subtle horror in Nirvor's eyes. Mason could not understand exactly what repulsed him; he was not to know this until much later. But he knew, with a dreadful certainty, that the woman was a Horror. . . .

Her lips were suddenly twisted with menace. But she choked back a flood of words, stood up, and Mason stood up beside her. This time she did not let her gaze meet the man's. She lifted pale hands to her throat, unbuckled the clasp that held the robe. It slipped down rustling to her feet.

Mason tried to look away—and found he could not. Nirvor might be evil—but she was a goddess indeed, a marble Galatea sprung to life and instinct with passion. She stepped forward; her bare arms went about Mason's neck.

Setting his jaw, he tore them free, thrust the woman back. Remembrance of the inexplicable strangeness in Nirvor's eyes was too strong.

"You say you come from the future," Mason whispered, gripping the woman's wrists. "How do I know what—creatures—may exist then?"

She caught the implication. Fury blazed in the jet eyes. She tore free, sprang back, shrilled an angry command.

"Slay him, Bokya—slay!"

The black leopard sprang erect. It crouched, stalking slowly toward Mason.

A voice said sharply, "This man is the Master's, Nirvor. Slay him—and you die!"

CHAPTER III

VENGEANCE OF THE MASTER

MASON turned his head, saw Erech, the Sumerian, at the door. The man came striding swiftly down the ramp, his cold eyes harsh.

"Hear me? Nirvor—" .

The silver priestess hissed shrilly. The black leopard hesitated, slunk back to its place. Nirvor turned blazing eyes on the Sumerian.

"Since when have you commanded me?"

"I speak for the Master," Erech said smoothly, with an undertone of faint mockery. "And I do not think that even you care to defy him."

With an angry gesture Nirvor turned away, touched the altar. Again the pallid moon-fires sprang up. The Sumerian said, "I shall not speak of this episode to Greddar Klon. Nor would I advise you to do so."

The priestess made no reply, and Erech gripped Mason's arm, nodding toward the door. Silently Mason followed the other. Once they were in the corridor Erech blew out a long breath of relief.

"She's a demon, Ma-zhon—she and her familiars, those giant cats. Come along!" He pulled Mason with him till they reached the Sumerian's apartment. There, safely ensconced on furs, Erech grinned wryly.

"I thought the metal men had you. But you're not safe yet. Unless you want to take your chances with the Master—"

"Why should he harm me?" Mason asked, without much assurance.

"Well, there was another man who came as you did, out of nothing—a man named Murdach. He's in the vaults, chained and captive. I don't know why. True, Greddar Klon may not chain you—"

"I'd rather not make the experiment," Mason said. "But doesn't the Master know I'm here?"

"He isn't sure. Nirvor won't betray you, for that would mean betraying herself. I think you can hide in Al Bekr for a while, anyway. Its easy to find a white camel in a herd, but if it's dyed brown—" The Sumerian got up, found a length of cloth and a light cloak. "You'd best wear these."

Mason nodded. "When in Rome," he observed, but the other only stared. Then he remembered—Rome would not be born for thousands of years. Quickly Mason stripped, fashioned himself a loin-cloth, threw the cloak over his shoulders. Erech handed him a dagger. "I have no better weapon," he apologized. "My scimitar I need myself."

He led the way out into the passage, talking as he walked. "As for the Master, I don't know where he came from. Once Al Bekr was a paradise. Then Greddar Klon came, and with his magic enslaved us all. I was visiting Al Bekr when he arrived, having had occasion to flee Nippur." Diabolic mirth tinged his grim face for a moment.

"When my caravan got here, Alasa ruled. Then suddenly Greddar Klon came. I did not see that. Some say he sprang out of empty air, in broad daylight. He made himself ruler, took Alasa as hostage, and keeps her imprisoned. He has made this into a city of fear. Look about you!" Erech flung out an arm at the green-lit corridor. "Al Bekr was not unduly beautiful before, but now it's like living underground with devils! Well, cities are no places for men anyway. If I—but none can escape. Some have tried, and died. Greddar Klon's slaves are everywhere."

The passage broadened. Behind them came quick footsteps. Mason felt the Sumerian nudge him. Racing past came a metal robot. If it saw them, it gave no heed. From the distance came the thudding tramp of many feet. The clanging note of a bell rang out.

Erech cursed. His eyes rolled, as though seeking a way of escape. More robots passed them. Mason gripped his dagger.

"No!" The Sumerian seized his wrist, pulled his hand from the weapon. His voice was low and urgent. "There's danger, but we may escape. Come!" He quickened his footsteps.

THE metal men moved on, arm-tentacles swinging, bulging eyes astare. The clatter of their footsteps filled the passage. The bell clanged out again.

"It summons the city to the Council Room," Erech said. "All must be there. We've no chance to find a hiding place for you now. We must wait. . . ."

Five minutes later they emerged into a great, high-ceilinged room. It was vast, awe-inspiring in its bare hugeness. It was of white stone, windowless, lit with the inevitable green-glowing bars. Tunnel mouths ringed the walls. A multitude of men and women, a few children, were pouring from the passages.

Guided by Erech, Mason joined the rest. At one end of the great chamber

was a raised dais, bare save for a silvery metal ovoid that hung in the air, apparently without support. It was perhaps seven feet long. Strangely it reminded Mason of a coffin. At sight of it he felt Erech grow tense beside him.

The room was filling with a surging multitude, brown-faced, furtive-eyed. They spoke in hushed tones among themselves, casting occasional quick glances toward the dais. To Mason it was strange indeed to hear the low mutterings of a language which no longer existed save among a few scholars—in his time, at least.

From the high ceiling a black disk dropped. Its descent was arrested, and it hung swaying above the crowd. The whispings died into silence.

Two robots, side by side, emerged from a tunnel mouth beyond the dais. At their heels came rolling something like a great metal sphere, with the top sliced off—a huge hollow cup. Over its edge Mason saw a swollen, blue-veined bald head, bulbous and hideous—a monstrously bloated caricature of a human skull. Two sharp, beady eyes peered out intently from beneath that tremendous brain case.

Mason cast a sidelong glance at the Sumerian. Erech's eyes were cynical—yet they were troubled, too. Mason realized that the warrior's half-contempt for the Master had been not quite real—that it masked an uneasy, reluctant fear of Greddar Klon. To Erech the Master must appear like some monstrous baroque, for he did not realize or understand, as did Mason, that with the passing of hundreds of thousands of years the human race would evolve into beings like the strange man on the dais.

Slowly the car rolled on behind the robots. A pale, slender hand, with elongated, tentacular fingers, writhed into view above the edge of the cup. The robots paused on the dais, and the car wheeled between them to face the audience, among which, Mason saw, other robots stood like guards. A murmur went up from the throng.

"The Master!"

Mason lifted a quizzical eyebrow. He could understand now how Greddar Klon maintained his rule over the superstitious natives of Al Bekr, playing on their fear of the unknown. The entire auditorium, he saw suddenly, was like a huge

theatre, cunningly arranged to impress the beholder with its mystery, its strangeness. Mason might find danger in the formidable science of Greddar Klon—but this mummery he could recognize and discount. Somehow he did not feel so utterly lost and helpless now.

The Master lifted a slender hand, and the throngs knelt. Mason found a position behind a fat, shaven-headed man in a woolen cloak.

From the black disk dangling overhead came a flat, metallic voice. Mason glanced up cautiously. The apparatus—a radio amplifier, probably—must be strange indeed to Erech and the others.

"I have imprisoned Alasa, your queen," the voice said emotionlessly. "For a long time she has been my hostage, ever since I learned she was plotting to revolt against me. I have warned you, people of Al Bekr, that at the first sign of another revolt she would die. Well—there has been no such attempt. That I grant."

THE Master's inscrutable eyes roved over the kneeling throng. Mason looked down quickly as the probing glance moved toward him. Again the toneless voice sounded.

"The prison of Alasa has been in plain view, as a warning. Yet it was forbidden to touch it. That command has not been obeyed."

Greddar Klon's head bent for a moment. A robot appeared in the tunnel mouth behind the dais, a tentacle-arm curled about the neck of a girl who walked beside it—a girl of perhaps twenty, her dark eyes distended, her hair matted with dried blood. She wore a plain white robe, torn and stained.

The metallic ovoid that hung above the dais dropped lower. The silvery sheen changed. Over its surface a shimmering play of color crawled. It became transparent as glass.

Within it was a girl.

Mason felt the Sumerian nudge him. "Alasa—our ruler," Erech whispered.

She lay within the transparent coffin, eyes closed, her dark hair falling in ringlets about an ivory, piquant face, and there was a strangely elfin beauty about her, enhanced by the close-fitting green garment she wore. Mason caught his breath, staring with his eyes. A scarcely noticeable movement went through the

throng.

"It is death to touch Alasa's prison," the disk said coldly. "Let no one turn away his eyes."

Robots held the white-robed girl firmly. Others brought forward a curious appliance. Swiftly they ripped away the single garment, baring the captive's slim body in utter nudity. She cried out, fought vainly to escape.

But the robots were too strong. Dozens of circular disks, transparent as glass, were pressed against the girl's flesh, clinging apparently by suction. Flexible tubes led from them to a bulky machine on the dais.

A movement nearby drew Mason's attention. A man had risen to his feet, a brawny warrior with grey-streaked beard who was staring fascinated at the spectacle. Mason, following his gaze, felt cold horror touch him.

The girl on the dais was—changing! The skin beneath the innumerable glass cups grew red and inflamed. She screamed in agony, writhing against the metallic arms of the robots. Her naked body was no longer white—it was covered with dozens of crimson disks—

Mason understood. The air within the glass cups was being pumped out; powerful suction was wrenching at the girl's flesh.

There were little beads of perspiration on Erech's face. The Sumerian's jaw was grimly set, but he could not disguise the fear in his eyes. Under cover of the low murmur that filled the room Mason muttered, "It's trickery, Erech."

The Sumerian turned doubtful eyes upon him, glaced back swiftly to the dais. From the corner of his mouth he whispered, "You are wrong, Ma-zhon. This is not the first time it has happened. I—I do not like being afraid, Ma-zhon!"

The girl shrieked, her voice knife-edged with pain. The frightful suction tore at her flesh. Blood spurted into the glass cups. Nerves and veins and arteries were ripped into ghastly chaos. Her body became a shapeless mass of puffy, bleeding meat.

Someone shouted. Mason turned his head in time to see a spear flash through the air, hurled by the grey-beard he had already noticed. Like a white flame the weapon flashed through the room, raced at the Master—and rebounded, fell clattering to the stones!

A beam of yellow light darted out from the dais. There was a shrill scream as the ray impinged on tender skin. It swung toward the greybeard. The man shouted, toppled back, his face a blackened cindery mass. "Beware!" the disk roared. "Beware the vengeance of the Master!"

"I knew him," the Sumerian muttered. "It was his daughter whom the Master slew just now—" He stopped as the murmuring of the throng suddenly died away.

IN the stillness the voice of the black disk sounded unnaturally loud. "Let Nine-Seven-Four come forward," it said. Erech drew in his breath sharply.

Then, without a glance at Mason, the Sumerian rose and strode toward the dais. Just before he reached it he came to a stop, facing the Master.

"Where is the stranger who was in your quarters?" The voice came from Greddar Klon's thin lips, not from the amplifying disk overhead.

Erech said loudly, "I do not know. He escaped from my quarters." Mason knew the words were intended for his own ears.

So, apparently, did Greddar Klon. The Master's voice rang out again flatly.

"I speak to you, stranger. Come forward."

Mason did not move. A robot stepped forward. Its tentacle-arm coiled about Erech's neck. The Sumerian's hand leaped to the hilt of his scimitar, and then fell away. Amazingly the toneless voice spoke—in English, oddly accented but recognizable.

"I—mean you no—harm. Come forward, if you—wish to return to your own—time-sector."

Startled, Mason involuntarily made a movement, hesitated, and then stood up quickly. After all, he had no choice. The tentacle about Erech's neck silently warned him of the torture that would be inflicted on the Sumerian if the Master were not obeyed.

Mason hurried forward, the target of furtive glances, passing Erech without a word. The swarthy warrior stared straight ahead, his face immobile. Greddar Klon nodded, and the robot uncoiled its tentacle from Erech's neck, twined it instead about Mason's upper arm. There was no menace in the gesture—rather, it

seemed as though the creature had taken his arm to guide him. Mason felt a gentle tug, and the robot urged him toward the tunnel mouth behind the dais. The weird, spherical metal head, with its strange, faceted eye, stared down at him blankly.

With a glance at Erech, Mason followed the robot past the still form of Alasa, motionless within her transparent prison. Again the elfin beauty of her caught at Mason's throat. Then the green-lit depths of a passage swallowed him. . . .

He was taken to the great room of the two monoliths. There he waited, still with the cold tentacle curled about his arm, till the sound of tramping footsteps came. Into the huge chamber came the two guardian robots; behind them Greddar Klon in his metal car. The Master stopped the vehicle, swung open a door, laboriously climbed out to the floor.

Now Mason had an opportunity to study the strange man more closely. He was short, his body dwarfed but thick-set, and the arms were slender, boneless, terminating in elongated fingers. The bowed legs were thick and strong. They had to be, in order to support that tremendous brain-case. A close-fitting black garment covered the stocky body, the shoulders of which scarcely came to Mason's waist. The dwarf's head was papery-white, blue-veined. Almost Mason could imagine it pulsed with the throb of the living brain within. The bones of the skull must be very thin—the thought stirred something in his mind.

The tiny, pointed jaw moved, and a shrill voice spoke in syllables Mason did not understand. He said, in English, "I am sorry but I do not speak your tongue."

The other replied haltingly in the same language. "I—know yours. Have studied—records—" He lapsed into pure Semite, speaking more fluently. "Let us speak the root tongue. I have had reason to speak it much of late, though at first it gave me difficulty. You are from the future. So am I—but a future far later than yours." He nodded. The tentacle unwound from Mason's arm. The robot paced away, returned with a heap of furs. Greddar Klon dropped upon them, and the robot brought more furs, threw

them in a heap beside Mason. He, too, sank down.

"Let me explain. In my day I built a time-machine, a projector which hurled me back into the past. There was an error in my calculations, almost fatal. I had intended to move only a few days into the future. But the time current was very swift. . . . I emerged in this ancient city. And I had no way of returning. My time projector was not, of course, in existence. It would not exist till I built it, far in the future."

THE cold eyes dwelt enigmatically on Mason. "I rebuilt my device. This time—somewhat differently. For I do not wish to err again—I do not care to go back to the Pliocene, or on to a dying, airless world. I have not yet finished my experiments. Do you know why I have told you this?"

Mason shook his head. Cameos of muscle ridged on his jaw.

"Not friendliness—no. I want your brain. Your intelligence. The robots will obey—but they are mindless. There are certain delicate operations and calculations . . . in my own time I had capable assistants, but I cannot use these barbarians, of course. You can help me. Your mind is undeveloped, but the rudiments of scientific knowledge are there. I wish your aid."

He watched Mason for a moment and then went on, "It is the only way in which you can return to your own time. Do not let emotion sway you. These people here are nothing to me. Nor are you, save that I can use you. Help me—or die."

The archeologist hesitated. He did not doubt that refusal would mean death, or, at least, torture. He must play for time . . . until he understood more of this alien, enigmatic world.

"Very well. I'll help you," Mason spoke wearily.

"Good." Greddar Klon peered closely at Mason. "You are tired. You must sleep now, and when you are refreshed we can begin."

A robot came forward. It took Mason's arm, urged him toward a passage.

The voice of the Master came, flat and ominous.

"Remember—I do not trust you. But I think you understand that treachery will mean your death!"

CHAPTER IV

THE CONSPIRATORS

FOR seven hours Mason slept dreamlessly, on a mound of furs in one of the bare apartments of Al Bekr. Once he roused at an unfamiliar sound to go to the door and open it. Outside the portal one of the metal robots stood motionless on guard. Smiling wryly, Mason returned to his couch and relaxed in sleep.

The next time he awoke it was to find a hard, calloused palm clamped over his mouth. Startled, he fought desperately for a moment, and then paused as he heard the urgent whisper of Erech.

"Quiet, Ma-zhon! Be silent!"

The Sumerian's swarthy face was glistening with sweat. He took his hand from Mason's mouth, said, "We must be quick. There's a journey you must make before the Master sends for you."

"The robot—" Mason nodded toward the door. Erech's thin lips broadened in a grin.

"I've taken care of him. With this—see?" He brought out from the folds of his cloak a curious egg-shaped contrivance, milkily luminescent. "I got it from Murdach."

Murdach! Mason remembered—the man from the future whom Greddar Klön had imprisoned in the vaults of Al Bekr.

"How—"

"Murdach is wise—and powerful, though he's in chains. I visited him—after the Master had punished me for hiding you." The Sumerian rubbed his back gingerly, wincing. "I do not love the lash's kiss—no! Well, I told Murdach of you, and he has made a plan. He gave me this weapon against the metal men, and asked me to bring you to him. And Alasa, too—for the Master intends to slay her."

"What are we waiting for?" Mason asked. He sprang lightly to his feet, moved toward the door. His hand strayed toward the dagger at his belt, but Erech merely chuckled.

"No danger—so long as we move quietly. Murdach's weapon is powerful."

The Sumerian opened the door. The robot stood silent across the threshold, its faceted eye blank and dull. It made no move as the two men passed it. Erech said:

"It's under a spell."

Mason lifted quizzical eyebrows. True, to the superstitious Sumerian this must seem magic indeed, but the cause of the robot's paralysis could be guessed. The egg-like weapon of Murdach, perhaps, emitted a ray which temporarily short-circuited the energy that activated the robot. How long, Mason wondered, would the metal man remain thus?

"Come on," Erech said, leading the way along the corridor. Silently the archeologist followed. Through green-lit, empty tunnels they went swiftly, and at last came out into the great room of the dais, where Greddar Klön had tortured and killed the Semite girl before the assembled multitudes of Al Bekr. The chamber was vacant now, save for the glass coffin that hung in empty air. Erech ran lightly toward it, Mason at his heels.

From a tunnel mouth a robot came striding. The Sumerian flung up his arm, the luminous, enigmatic weapon of Murdach's gripped in his thick fingers. From the shining object a pencil-thin beam of light sprang out.

It struck the robot's body. It spread, crawling over the metal surface like liquid. Suddenly the robot was a glowing figure of living light.

The monster stopped in mid-stride, tentacles rigidly outstretched. It stood frozen.

The light-beam died. Erech hid the weapon in his garments.

"Now for Alasa," he growled. "Murdach told me how to free her. If I can remember—"

The Sumerian touched the opaque coffin, ran his hand lightly over its surface. He cursed softly—and then caught his breath. Beneath his fingers something clicked; there was a high-pitched, strange sound, as though a violin string had abruptly broken.

The coffin sank down, opening as it dropped. Within it lay Alasa—unmoving, asleep.

MASON leaned forward, his eyes intent on the girl. Alasa's beauty seemed scarcely earthly as she lay there,

and for a moment Mason feared that she would not awaken.

Then the long, lark lashes lifted; warmly golden eyes looked into the man's. In that gaze a queer understanding came, and Alasa—smiled. No longer goddess—but human indeed!

Fear came into her face. She arose with a lithe motion, and looked around with the wariness of a hunted thing. In Semite Mason said:

"Do not be afraid. We come to free you—not to harm."

Alasa eyed him doubtfully. The Sumerian said:

"That is true. You know me, I think—and you know how I fought when the Master first came."

For the first time Alasa spoke, her voice low, a little husky, as though her vocal cords had not been used for long. "Yes, I know you, Erech. I trust you. But—tell me, how long have I been in this prison."

"Thrice four moons," Erech said. "But come; we'll talk as we go. There's no time to waste." He turned to the coffin, closed it, lifted it into the air, where it hung unsuspended. "The Master may not discover you're gone for a while, anyhow."

The Sumerian led the way. He seemed thoroughly familiar with the intricate maze of Al Bekr, though more than once Alasa's eyes widened in wonder at sight of her transformed city. Glancing aside at her, Mason felt his pulses leap at the girl's strangely elfin beauty. Once she looked at him with undisguised curiosity.

"You are from a distant land, I think," she observed. "Men of Al Bekr are either strong or handsome, but seldom both. You are not *very* handsome—" she chuckled, golden eyes lighting with mirth—"yet I like you!"

Before Mason could answer a shadow flitted past in the distance. It was the white leopard of Nirvor. It paused, eyeing the group inscrutably. Mason felt a shiver crawl down his spine. The creature was only a beast, of course—yet in its stare was a deadly malignancy and a queer spark of intelligence. . . .

The leopard slipped away and was gone. Erech whispered, "It is a demon. Bokya, the black one, is a killer—but white Valesta is like Malik Taus, peacock-devil of the eastern tribes. Hurry!"

The way led downward now, along steeply-sloping ramps, deserted, lit by the pale green radiance. Once they encountered a robot, but Erech's ray-weapon swiftly reduced it to immobility. Down they went, into the hidden depths beneath lost Al Bekr. . . .

And fear crept at Mason's heels, stalking him. A dread he could not suppress had risen within him ever since the white leopard had appeared. An inexplicable certainty that danger was drawing closer. . . .

Without warning disaster struck. From the gloom of a side passage a black bolt of lightning sprang—the black leopard! Right at Erech's head it leaped, and the Sumerian would have died then beneath grinding fangs had not Mason, almost without thought, lunged forward into the man's back, hurtling him aside. A razor claw raked Mason's arm. He felt fur brush his cheek, so close did death pass. Then the leopard seemed to turn in midair, green eyes blazing.

But Erech had drawn his scimitar. With fury no less than the beast's he crouched, teeth bared in a savage grin.

"Back, Ma-zhon! Guard Alasa! Your dagger is shorter than my blade—let me deal with this hell-spawn."

Mason thrust the girl behind him. He drew his dagger. The leopard advanced on Erech, tail switching erratically. And—

Darkness fell.

The green-glowing bars blinked out. Intense blackness shrouded the passage.

THE nearness of doom sent inspiration lancing into Mason's mind. He cried, "The weapon, Erech! Murdach's weapon—"

Whether the ray would paralyze the leopard Mason did not know. But, at least, the glowing egg would provide light—light enough so that the leopard could not kill unseen in the blackness.

Whether Erech heard Mason did not know. The floor trembled beneath his feet. It shuddered and sank down as he fought for footing. He felt Alasa's soft body cannon into his, and then the two of them were plummeting down into the abyss.

They did not fall far, and a mound of furs saved them from injury. In the stygian gloom Mason heard the girl's unsteady breathing. He put out an explor-

ing hand, touched the warm softness of an arm.

"Are you all right," Mason asked.

"I think so. But—Erech?"

Mason called the Sumerian's name. There was no response.

Light blazed into the room.

They were in a tiny cell, twelve feet square or less, walled and roofed with bare metal. Mason stood up, gripping his dagger.

A voice said mockingly, "Though Bokya fail—I do not. I am wiser than my leopards."

The voice of Nirvor! The Silver Priestess!

Mason looked around quickly. The unseen woman laughed softly.

"You cannot escape, either of you. You will die. Nor will the Master know I slew you. For when the centaur feeds, he leaves not even bones."

Even at that moment Mason found time to wonder why Nirvor bore him such hatred. Then he remembered his words and his shocked revulsion at the alien horror he had sensed in the eyes of the Silver Priestess. Nirvor remembered—and, to her, the offence was beyond forgiveness.

"I followed you," the cool voice went on, "till you reached the trap above the centaur's den. If the Master is too confident to guard himself against treachery, I shall guard him. For Greddar Klon has promised to bring back the glories of Corinoor under Selen, and you, who are his enemies, shall die—now!"

The floor tilted sharply. Once more Mason and Alasa dropped through space, alighting sprawled on a carpet of crackling straw. They were in a dim-lit chamber, high-roofed and huge. It seemed empty, though a black huddle loomed in a far corner.

Nirvor's voice came again. "Soon the centaur will waken. When you see him, pay homage to the Master's skill. For the centaur was once a man of Al Bekr, a fool and a murderer, who was bestialized in body and brain by Greddar Klon's science. He is not fed often. Nor are maidens often thrown into his den. And he is still partly human. . . ." Ironical laughter died away into silence. Mason glanced at Alasa's white face.

"Buck up," he said, lapsing into English, and then in Semite, "Have courage. We're not dead yet."

The girl's lips were pale. "Yet I fear—this is magic!"

"I'm quite a sorcerer myself," Mason jested with an assurance he did not feel. He had noticed that the dark bulk in the corner was stirring. It arose. Slowly it came forward into the light. . . .

Icy horror chilled the man. A centaur—living, breathing, alive—stood before him, a monster out of mythology sprung to sudden life. The Master's surgery had created it, Mason told himself, yet he could not force down his repulsion. The creature was monstrous!

It had the body of a beast, a dun horse, all caked and smeared with filth. From the shoulders grew the torso and arms of a man, hairy and knotted with great muscles. The head was human, and yet, in some indefinable manner—bestialized. There was no intelligence in the shallow eyes, but a pale shining of dull hatred and menace.

THE eyes flickered over him, swung to the girl. Light flared within them. The monster's loose, slobbering mouth twitched. It mouthed unintelligible sounds. The thick arms swung up. It pranced forward.

"Stay behind me," Mason said curtly. The dagger's hilt was cold in his hand. He lifted the weapon.

The centaur hesitated, looking down on the man. It seemed to sink down, crouching. And then it leaped.

It bounded forward, front hoofs flying, bellowing rage. As that gigantic mountain of flesh crashed down Mason thrust up desperately with the dagger. Whether his blow found a mark he did not know; a hoof smashed against his head, a glancing blow that sent him hurtling back, stunned. He fell in a limp heap on the straw.

Blackness surged up. Frantically he fought it back. His head was a blinding, throbbing ache of red agony, and when he forced open his eyes, he could not focus them properly.

Alasa's scream brought Mason back to full consciousness.

Unable to move, his muscles water-weak, he lay staring at the horror before him. The man-beast had gripped the girl in its hairy arms. The shallow eyes glared at her. One taloned hand swept out, snatched Alasa's garment, ripped it brutally away.

Frantically Mason battled his overpowering weakness, the sickening dizziness that nauseated him. The centaur belloved mad laughter.

And again the scream of Alasa came—terrified, hopeless!

CHAPTER V

MADNESS OF THE CENTAUR

THE centaur's monstrous head bent; watery orbs avidly dwelt on the girl's nudity. She struck out vainly, her nails ripping at the creature's face. Though blood came, the centaur paid no attention to its wounds.

Mason managed to crawl dizzily to his feet. The dagger lay glinting in the straw near him. He bent, picked it up. He turned toward the man-beast.

Alasa lay pale and motionless in the centaur's arms. The monster had no other thought than the girl. Its eyes were glaring and bloodshot. Spittle drooled from the sagging mouth. It did not see Mason as he crept forward.

The man had but one chance, and he knew it. Silently he stole up behind the beast. At the last moment the centaur sensed danger, started to whirl, roaring menace.

Mason's arm slashed down. The dagger ripped into the centaur's throat, slicing through skin and flesh and cartilage. A great gout of blood burst out, spattering the nude girl with scarlet.

With a deafening scream of agony the centaur dropped Alasa. Its hands clawed up to the ruined throat. It plunged at Mason.

He managed to dodge, though flying hoofs grazed his side. As the creature lunged past Mason put all his strength into a desperate leap. He felt iron-hard flesh under him, came down on the centaur's back, his arms locked about the monster's throat. The dagger was still in his hand.

The beast-man went berserk. Screaming, it flung back its hands, seeking its prey.

The taloned fingers sought Mason's eyes.

The man ripped out blindly with the dagger. He felt himself flung through the air, fell heavily on his side, rolling

over and over. Clashing hoofs thundered past. Swaying, Mason sprang up—and halted, staring.

The centaur was blind. The dagger's chance stroke had ripped across its eyeballs, slashing them open. The beast-face was veiled with blood. And if the monster had been enraged before—now it was a demon incarnate!

Blind and dying, it shrieked mad rage and murder-lust. Hoofs grinding down viciously on the straw, great arms swinging, the centaur drove around the den, hunting the man who had slain it. Mason saw Alasa lying near by. He dashed toward her, lifted her nude body in his arms. He staggered into a corner, and the centaur flashed past him like a Jugernaut.

It was a mad, fantastic game they played there, with the dying monster blindly seeking prey, and with Mason, carrying the girl, dodging and waiting alternately, his breath a raw, singeing flame in his throat. All at once the centaur grew still, its bloody arms hanging laxly, blind head lifted questingly as it listened.

The creature stiffened as the girl in Mason's arms moaned and stirred. Guided by the sound, it sprang forward—

And dropped—dead! It rolled in a gory, shapeless huddle over and over on the straw, the great wound in the throat ceasing to bleed as the mighty beast-heart slowed and stopped. It lay quiescent, its dreadful life ended for ever.

Reaction shook Mason. Dizzily he lowered the girl to the ground, relaxed beside her, weak and sick. But after a moment he rallied his strength and turned to Alasa. She was still and white as a marble statue, her pale body splotched with the centaur's blood. Mason's throat was suddenly dry. Was she even alive?

SWIFTLY he chafed her arms, striving to bring her back to consciousness. And at last the girl's lashes lifted; golden eyes looked into Mason's, wide and fearful. With a shuddering little cry Alasa clung to the man, no longer the queen of a mighty city, but a girl, frightened and thoroughly human. Involuntarily Mason bent his head, kissed the soft hollow of her throat, her rounded shoulders.

A flush turned Alasa's face rosy. She drew away, freed herself.

"There ought to be a way out of here," Mason said abruptly, unsteadily. "The Master depended on the centaur's killing his victims. There'd be no need to make this place a real prison. I—I'll look around."

In a corner Mason found a tiny stream that emerged from a hole in the wall and ran along a channel to disappear into a drain. Where the stream emerged there was a tube that slanted up into the darkness. It did not look inviting, but after a careful search of the den Mason realized that it was the only means of egress.

"Want to try it, Alasa?" he asked. The girl had been watching him, and now she nodded and came to his side. "I'll go first," Mason offered. "If I can get through, you'll be able to."

He fell on hands and knees, crept into the hole. The water was not deep. It rilled beneath him, icy-cold and murmuring softly.

Mason was in a tunnel, a tube barely wider than the width of his shoulders, so smooth that at times he almost lost his footing. If the slope grew much steeper, he knew, it would be impossible to mount it. Behind him he heard the girl, her breathing soft and uneven.

The faint light that filtered from behind them grew dim and died away entirely. They clambered through utter darkness.

Interminable journey through the hidden heart of Al Bekr! More than once Mason felt chill despair touch him, but he knew that to retrace his steps would be useless, probably fatal. In the den of the centaur they would be at the mercy of Nirvor and the Master, but here they had at least a chance, though a slim one.

The tube grew level again. Fumbling in the dark, Mason felt emptiness beside him. The sound of falling water came. He realized that the tunnel branched here, forking into two tubes up one of which they had climbed. He called, "Not too fast, Alasa! Take hold of my foot—"

Slowly they edged past the unseen abyss. Then forward again, on hands and knees that were raw and bleeding—on and on interminably. Until, at last, a faint greenish glow heartened Mason. He increased his pace.

A mesh grating was set in the tube

above him. He fumbled with it vainly. It was fast. With a word to the girl, Mason braced himself, thrusting his back against the barrier. Veins bulged in his forehead as he strained to lift it.

There was a faint creaking, but the grating did not give. Mason rested, and then tried again. This time he managed to burst open the grated metal.

Warily he lifted his head through the gap, peering around. They were in a room, green-lit and vacant, filled with water-tubes, pumps, unfamiliar machinery. Mason wriggled out through the gap he had made, helped Alasa climb free. Both of them were drenched and shuddering with cold.

"So far, so good," Mason said grimly. "Know where we are?"

The girl shook her head. Dark hair clung damply to her bare shoulders. "This city is strange to me also. I don't know how we can escape—or where we can hide."

"Well, we can't stay here," Mason grunted. "Come along." He led the way to a tunnel-mouth in the wall. Warily they hurried along it. Al Bekr was still sleeping—but it would awaken soon, Mason thought. Moreover, if they encountered one of the robot guards, they no longer had Murdach's paralysis-weapon.

TWICE they saw robots in the distance, but managed to evade them. It seemed hours later when, hurrying along a green-lit corridor, Mason heard footsteps approaching. He stopped short. Alasa's face was white. She whispered, "What—"

"We passed a door a minute ago," Mason said softly. "Come on!"

They ran back swiftly. The door was unlocked; Mason swung it open, revealing a tiny closet bristling with switches and apparatus. "In we go," he commanded. "Hope we don't electrocute ourselves."

The footsteps were louder. The two tumbled into the closet, and Mason drew the door shut. He had intended to leave a tiny crack for vision, but the panel swung closed with a click. In the darkness Mason fumbled for a latch. There was none.

The steps grew louder, hesitated, and faded in the distance. Mason could feel Alasa's warm breath on his cheek. He said quietly, "We can't get out. We're

locked in."

The girl said nothing for a moment, and then came into his arms, shuddering with cold and fear, clinging to him. The touch of her cool flesh dried Mason's throat. He resisted for briefly—and then a flame of passion swept away his caution. His hands touched silken curves; he felt Alasa's soft lips. Their touch was like fire.

He drew the girl close. With a little sob she put slim arms about Mason's neck. Their lips merged, and a trembling shudder shook Alasa's body as she strained toward him.

The footsteps came again—and another sound that electrified Mason. Soft, furious oaths—in a voice he knew.

The voice of Erech!

The girl had heard it too. She drew away, unseen in the darkness. Mason called with quiet urgency:

"Erech! Erech!"

Silence. Then the Sumerian's low tones.

"Eh? Who's that?"

"Mason. And Alasa. In here—"

The door swung open. Erech stood wide-eyed, his mouth open. His cloak was ribboned, his swarthy chest bleeding in a dozen places.

"I've found you—El-lil be praised! I've been searching all Al Bekr—"

He whipped off his cloak, gave it to the girl. She nodded gratefully, wrapping it around her nude form.

"I've no cloak for you, Ma-zhon—but you'll be back in your apartment in a moment. What happened to you?"

Mason told him. The Sumerian whispered an oath. "That she-devil—Nirvor! You saved my life, Ma-zhon, when you cried out for me to use Murdach's weapon. It gave me enough light to beat off the leopard. I didn't kill it—but I gave the beast some wounds to lick." He grinned unpleasantly.

"Now listen; Ma-zhon—and you, Alasa. I went to Murdach. I told him what had happened. He said there would be no time for him to talk to you now. Al Bekr will awaken soon. If you lived—he said—give you this message. Alasa I will hide safely. You, Ma-zhon, must pretend to obey the Master. Work with him as he wishes. Try to learn his secrets. Murdach knows something of them, but not enough. Later Murdach will join his knowledge to yours, and the

two of you—with my aid—may defeat Greddar Klon."

Mason nodded. "Okay. I mean—it is well, Erech. You say Alasa will be safe?"

"For a time. I know the hidden places of Al Bekr. We must hurry. Ma-zhon—" The Sumerian gave Mason explicit directions for returning to his apartment. "Go now. Swiftly. Obey the Master till you hear from me."

Alasa ran to the archeologist, her golden eyes anxious. "And you will guard yourself—for my sake!" She lifted her pale face, and—

Mason kissed her again. He heard the Sumerian whistle, shrill with astonishment. The girl turned to Erech, said imperiously, "Let us go. Now!"

SHRUGGING, Erech led Alasa along the corridor. His lips still fragrant with the honey-musk of the girl's kiss, Mason went in the opposite direction, smiling a little.

And soon he found his apartment. The robot guard still stood before the door, unmoving as Mason slipped within. He cleansed and bathed his wounds as well as he could, donned a cloak that would hide them from the Master's suspicious eyes. Then he relaxed on the mound of furs.

He slept, but not for long. The robot was beside him, gently gripping his arm, urging him to his feet. A little thrill of fear shook Mason. Had the Master discovered what had happened? Had Nirvor spoken?

No—the Silver Priestess would be silent, for her own sake. Reason told Mason that the Master would be merciless if he knew Nirvor had tried to kill the man Greddar Klon needed to aid him. With an assumption of nonchalance the archeologist accompanied the robot to the room of the green monoliths.

The Master was reclining on furs. He thrust a flask at Mason. "Drink," the shrill voice piped. "It is not a drug. Rather a food, neutralizing the toxins of weariness."

Mason drank. His fatigue dropped from him.

The Master made no reference to Alasa's escape, if he knew of it, which Mason did not think likely. He arose on his bowed legs.

"Now we shall begin!"

The ordeal started. And it was a racking and cruel one; Mason's brain had never worked so fast, and, despite the energizing effect of the liquid, a dull headache began to oppress him. He could only guess at much of the nature of the work he did. Remembering Erech's command, he tried to memorize his activities and those of Greddar Klon.

Under the Master's direction he moved levers, spun wheels, sent light-rays impinging on huge machines. From time to time, at the dwarf's dictation, he made cryptic notations with a stylus upon a camera-shaped device on which a scroll was wound—a variation on a notebook. And, as Mason worked, a trickle of knowledge crept into his brain. He began to understand some of the machines and powers of the Master of Al Bekr.

Several times he had attempted to hand objects to the dwarf, and had felt an invisible solid repel his hands—a shell of energy, Greddar Klon explained, which protected him from danger. "An atomic mesh guarding my body, through the interstices of which I can breathe, but which cannot be penetrated otherwise—by weapons or rays." The cold eyes examined Mason impassively.

Remembering the spear that had rebounded from this invisible armor, the archeologist realized its necessity. And, as they worked, Mason noticed several of the transparent ovoids about, similar to the one which had imprisoned Alasa. Several were large, fully twenty feet long. "I use them for aerial travel when I have need to leave Al Bekr," the dwarf said.

One thing Mason learned was that the air pressure within these ovoids could be controlled—increased or decreased. This he remembered, though at the time he did not realize the importance of the device.

"I have given the barbarians of Al Bekr comforts they never knew before," Greddar Klon said. "Of course, I built the city for my own comfort primarily, while I was working on my projector. But they will still have it when I'm gone, though they'll be unable to actuate the machines. Come."

He led the way to one of the ovoids—twenty feet long, of opaque silvery metal. Greddar Klon touched a stud, and a disk-shaped door swung open. He

motioned Mason within, followed him. As he turned to the instrument panel Mason watched his movements closely. The walls of the ship shimmered, faded—became shadowy, transparent. The ovoid lifted, drove up.

They raced up swiftly beside the giant pillars. At their summit, between them, a platform had been constructed, and on this the ship alighted. At a dizzy height above the floor the work continued, amazingly intricate adjustments and calculations which Mason did his best to understand. And presently the dwarf, his voice emotionless as ever, announced, "It is finished. There remains only one thing."

THE two were within the ship, but now Greddar Klon opened the port. He pointed to a lever on the platform a dozen feet away. "Pull that over. Then return—swiftly!"

Mason obeyed. As he returned to the ship he caught a fleeting glance from the Master, curiously veiled, and wondered. The dwarf said, "I have improved my original projector. Watch."

Silently a pale shimmer of white flame began to spread in empty air between the summits of the green towers. Glowing filaments and tentacles, like tatters of some huge curtain, danced and fluttered, spreading, ever closing the gap between the monoliths. The green light faded, fled back. In the white glare distorted shadows marched grotesquely on the distant walls.

"Before—I guessed at my destination in time. Now I can control it. The energy of the projector is being transmitted to this ship, giving it the power to move in time."

Now the white curtain was unbroken, flaming all around the ovoid's transparent walls. Mason's eyes ached as he watched it.

Then it snapped out and vanished. It was gone.

Coldly Greddar Klon said, "It is ended. My experiment is finished—and successful."

He touched the control board. "One test, though. We'll move back in time—for one revolution of the Earth."

The ship trembled, swayed. And suddenly utter, stygian blackness fell, through which screamed the vibration of energy inconceivable!

CHAPTER VI

TERROR IN AL BEKR

BEFORE Mason could do more than catch his breath light came again. The ship had apparently not moved—yet the scene visible through the transparent walls was entirely different.

No longer were they in the room of the twin monoliths. The ship hung in empty air twenty feet above the roofs of a strange, archaic city. It was Al Bekr, Mason knew—but Al Bekr as it had been before the Master's arrival.

A city of roughly-cut stone and mud-daubed huts, such a city as Babylon might have been before the days of its splendor—like Chaldean Ur before its ruin. Men and women moved quietly about the streets. They had not as yet glimpsed the ship hovering above.

"I am satisfied," the Master said. "I can control the time-change accurately. Now we return."

Again darkness. And again it lifted, to show the room of the green towers. Greddar Klon sent the ship drifting down to the distant floor.

"When are you going to start?" Mason asked. The cold eyes probed him.

"Tomorrow. You had best return to your apartment and rest. I will need your aid soon."

Mason turned to the opening port. He vaulted lightly down and went to a tunnel-mouth. But something he had read in the Master's glance made him wary. He lurked in the passage out of sight, waiting.

Nor had he long to wait. Presently a low, distant voice sounded.

"You sent for me, Greddar Klon."

The voice of Nirvor, the Silver Priestess.

And the Master's reply:

"All is ready. We can start now."

A pause. Then Nirvor said, "My leopards. I must get them."

Mason wiped his forehead. So Greddar Klon intended betrayal. He planned to return to the future with Nirvor, leaving Mason behind. Well—Mason would not have gone without Alasa; but the thought came to him: would it not be best thus? With Nirvor and Greddar Klon gone, Alasa could rule Al Bekr as

before.

And then—what? Mason himself would be marooned in a long-forgotten time sector, together with Murdach, the man from the future. Perhaps Murdach could help. True, Mason had been ordered to obey the Master till he received word from the Sumerian, but this was an emergency.

If he could only find Erech! But he did not know where to look. Mason, about to turn away, was halted by Nirvor's return. He edged forward cautiously, listening to the priestess' soft laughter, and caught sight of the woman. She was moving toward the time-ship, the two leopards beside her. She entered it. The leopards sprang lithely through the portal. Greddar Klon followed.

What now? Indecision held Mason motionless. His impulse was to halt the Master, kill him if possible. But how? The atomic shield could not be penetrated by any weapon made by man. And there were the leopards—

The problem was solved for him. The ship suddenly grew hazy, a shimmering, oval shadow. It faded and was gone.

Where the time-ship had been was nothing. It had been launched on its incredible journey into the future.

A hand gripped Mason's shoulder. He whirled to face Erech.

"Murdach sent me," the Sumerian said. "The Master's gone, eh?"

Mason nodded wordlessly. Suddenly Erech grinned.

"Good! That's what Murdach wanted. He sent me to watch you, to stop you from doing anything rash. There was no time before to warn you. Come along now. I've freed Murdach, with the aid of his magic weapon. He's with Alasa."

MASON was conscious of a heightening of his pulses as he followed the Sumerian along the corridor. The robots were not visible; Mason wondered what they would do without the Master's will to direct them.

Soon he was to find out, in a manner that would not be pleasant. No premonition of this came to him now as he paused with Erech before a metal door, followed the other over the threshold. In the bare room two people were standing, Alasa, and a slim, hawk-faced patrician figure who was, Mason knew, Murdach. The man from the future wore the rem-

nants of a tattered leather uniform. His forehead, while high and broad, did not have the bulging malformation of Greddar Klon's. Red hair stood up stiffly, but of eyebrows and lashes he had no trace.

Murdach said, his voice smooth and velvety, "You've brought him. Good." Enigmatic black eyes regarded Mason intently.

"Greddar Klon's gone," the archeologist said, frowning. "You know that?"

"Yes. And that is well. He is out of the way, while we make our plans to follow him."

At the audacity of the scheme Mason's eyes widened. Murdach went on:

"You do not know Greddar Klon's plan. He intends to become the ruler of the greatest civilization ever erected. A cosmic pirate, traveling through all ages, picking the best brains and the mightiest scientific powers from ancient times to the furthestmost future. He told me of this, and asked my aid. Mason—that is your name, eh?—he plans to build his civilization in a time-sector which can offer little resistance. He has chosen your decade."

Mason caught his breath. "He can't—"

"He has the power, with the time-ship to aid him. When he has looted time, he'll halt in 1929, wipe out mankind, subjugating a few races into slavery, and rear his civilization there. My plan is to follow him, building another time-ship—and kill him if I can. Will you aid me?"

Mason nodded. "That goes without saying!" A nightmare vision rose up in the archeologist's mind; a vision of a world in which time had lost its meaning, a world cowering beneath the tremendous powers of Greddar Klon. He drew a deep breath. "Can you build the ship?"

"With your aid. That was why I told you to watch the Master as you helped him. In collaboration we can fit together the pieces of the puzzle."

Alasa put a slim hand on Mason's arm. "I'm going with you, of course."

"You can't," Mason told her. "There'll be danger, and lots of it."

She lifted an imperious head. "What of that? Greddar Klon put me to shame—enslaved me and slew my subjects. Also, you have saved me, and I pay my debts. I go with you!"

"And I, too," the Sumerian broke in. "I've a wish to try my scimitar on the Master's neck, when his magic isn't guarding him."

"No more argument," Murdach said. "They will accompany us, if they wish. They hate Greddar Klon—and hatred is sometimes a powerful weapon." He turned to the door, and the others followed. Mason slipped the girl's arm within his own, squeezing it reassuringly. Her golden eyes laughed up at him gaily. They might be going into deadly peril—but Alasa was not lacking in courage.

In the room of the green monoliths all was still. Quickly Murdach moved about, his keen black eyes taking in all that was to be seen. He indicated a twenty-foot ovoid nearby.

"We can use that for our time-ship," he said. "But it's necessary first to build up the atomic force Greddar Klon used. Do you remember how he used this ray-device?"

Mason explained as well as he was able. Murdach nodded with satisfaction and made hasty adjustments. Slowly, gradually, the brain of the man from the future duplicated the Master's experiments. Mason began to feel hope mounting within him.

He was beneath one of the monoliths, explaining a control board to Murdach, when the girl cried warning. Mason swung about. From a tunnel-mouth raced two robots, faceted eyes alight, arm-tentacles swinging. They made for the group under the time towers.

SWIFTLY Murdach brought up his egg-shaped weapon. From it the ray sprang out, stilling the robots with fantastic swiftness. They stood silent, unmoving. But from the passage came the thunder of racing feet.

Murdach bit his lips. "I was afraid of this," he whispered. "Greddar Klon foresaw that we might follow him. Before he left, he ordered his robots to kill us. I doubt if we'll have time now."

"Time?" It was the Sumerian, battle-lust in his eyes. He stooped, snatched up a huge sledge-hammer. "Give Alasa your weapon, Murdach. You and Mazhon finish your task. We'll hold off those demons!"

Alasa snatched the ray-projector, raced toward the tunnel-mouth, Erech at

her heels. Murdach smiled grimly.

"Let us hurry. We may have a chance, after all."

Mason was frowning, looking around for a weapon. The other gripped his arm.

"You can best help by aiding me. We can't battle all the robots. Only if we get the time-ship completed can we escape."

A metal man lunged into view, silent and menacing. The ray-projector in Alasa's hand stilled him. But there were others—hundreds of them, pressing eagerly forward. Some the girl halted. Others fell victim to Erech.

The Sumerian roared red battle-curses. The sledge rose and fell in sweeping, crashing blows, grinding the metal heads of the robots beneath its drive. But slowly the two were pressed back—slowly, inexorably.

Murdach's fingers flew, adjusting, testing. Mason stole a glance at the battling pair, and straightened, his breath hissing between his teeth as he saw Erech go down beneath a flailing tentacle. The archeologist leaped forward. The girl might hold back the robots for a moment—no longer.

Leaping over the Sumerian's body, Mason snatched up the sledge. He saw the featureless, blank head of a robot looming before him. A tentacle slashed down, vicious and deadly. Mason swung the hammer in a great arc.

Metal sang under the blow. The robot fell away and was gone. But behind him came others. Erech sprang up, spitting blood.

"The hammer, Ma-zhon! Let me—"

Behind them came Murdach's urgent cry. "Come! It's finished!"

Mason gripped Alasa's hand, ran toward Murdach, half dragging the girl. Behind him Erech shouted triumphantly, and then followed. The robots came in pursuit with a dull thudding of swift feet.

Murdach was waiting at the port of the ship. He sprang back into the interior as Mason thrust the girl aboard, tumbled after her, Erech behind him. The door clanged shut just as the robots reached the ovoid. With insensate, brainless fury they attacked the metallic walls.

White-faced, Murdach turned to the control board, sent the ship driving up. He lowered it gently on the platform at

the summit of the twin monoliths.

"That lever," he said, pointing. "You moved that one?"

Mason nodded. "Shall I—"

"Yes."

The archeologist opened the port, slipped out. He glanced over the platform's edge to see the robots milling about aimlessly beneath. Then he moved the lever and raced back to the ship.

Breathlessly the four waited. Presently white flame fingered out from the monoliths. Silently it spread, lacing and interweaving, till the walls were a sea of pale flame.

And it died.

For a moment no one spoke.

"Think it'll work?" Mason asked shakily.

"It must!" But Murdach's voice was none too steady. Nevertheless he turned to the controls, fingering them tentatively. Though Mason had expected it, nevertheless he felt a shock when darkness blanketed them.

IT lifted. The ship hung above a green oasis, with high palms growing about a pool. In the cloudless blue sky the sun blazed brilliantly. For miles around the oasis was a desolate wilderness of sand and rock.

Alasa whispered, "Our legends say Al Bekr was like this once, long and long ago."

"There was no oasis in my day," Mason said. "We've gone back into the past."

"Then we'll go forward again," Murdach smiled, his eyes no longer grim and cold. "All time lies before us."

"Gods!" the Sumerian said hoarsely. "This is magic indeed!"

The girl touched Murdach's arm. "What of my people? The robots may slay them."

"No. Their energy must be renewed periodically, or they're lifeless and inanimate. Without Gred-dar Klon to do that, they'll run down—lost their life-force. Your people are safe enough, Alasa."

"But my epoch isn't," Mason grunted. He was beginning to understand something of the incredible task before them. How could they find Gred-dar Klon in the vast immensity of time—and, if they succeeded in finding him, how could they defeat the super-science

of the Master, augmented, perhaps, by the powers of a dozen future civilizations?

As though guessing his thought, Murdach said, "I can locate Greddar Klon easily enough. His ship causes a warp in the space-time continuum that instruments can detect. But as for fighting him—I would like to get aid first. We can best do that far in the future. Surely there must exist there some weapon that will destroy the Master!"

He touched the instrument board. Once more darkness blanketed them. Mason felt the girl's soft body huddle against him, and he put a protective arm about her. The Sumerian was cursing softly and fluently.

And the ship raced into time, into the cryptic twilight of Earth, driving blindly toward mystery and toward horror inconceivable!

CHAPTER VII

IN TIME'S ABYSS

LIGHT came. They hung a thousand feet about the black, sullen waters of a sea that stretched to the horizon. There was no sign of land. In a black, star-studded sky loomed a globe of dull silver, incredibly vast. Its diameter covered fully a third of the heavens.

Mason said uncomprehendingly, "The Moon—but it's close, Murdach—very close! How far in the future have we gone?"

Murdach's face was white. He eyed the instruments, reached out a tentative hand, withdrew it. Hesitating, he said, "Something is wrong. I did not know—"

"Wrong?" The Sumerian growled an oath. "You said you'd mastered this hell-chariot!"

"I—I thought I had. But it is astruse—Greddar Klon came from a more advanced world than mine."

"We're not—" Mason felt oddly cold as he asked the question. "We're not marooned here, are we?"

Murdach's lips tightened. He gripped a lever, swung it over. His slim fingers danced over the control panel. Nothing happened.

"For a while, at least," he said at last. "I cannot send the machine into time. But soon I can discover what's wrong, or at least I think so."

Alasa smiled, though her eyes were frightened golden pools. "Then do your best, Murdach. The sooner you succeed, the sooner we'll find the Master."

"No, no," Murdach told her impatiently. "We'll find Greddar Klon in a certain time-sector. Whether we start now or in an hour or in fifty years will make no difference."

"Fifty years!" Erech's vulturine face was worried. "And in the meantime—what will we live on? What will we eat?"

Ten hours later the question reoccurred. Both Murdach and Mason were haggard and red-eyed from their calculations and their study of the time-ship's principles. The former said at last, "How long this will take I don't know. We'd better find food. Too bad we took none with us."

"Where?" the Sumerian asked. He glanced around expressively at the bleak, lonely expanse of sea and Moon-filled sky. "I think Ran, the goddess of the Northmen, has claimed the world for her own. The ocean-goddess. . . ."

"There'll be land," Mason said rather hopelessly as Murdach sent the ship lancing through the air. "If we go far enough."

But it was no long distance to the shore—a flat, barren plain of grayish sandy soil, eroded to a horizontal monotony by the unceasing action of wind and wave. No mountains were visible. Only the depressingly drab land, stretching away to a dark horizon. And there was no life. No animals, no vegetation; a chill emptiness that seemed to have no end. The dreadful loneliness of it made Mason shudder a little.

"Is this the end?" he wondered softly, aloud. "The end of all Earth?"

Sensing his mood, though not comprehending the reason for it, Alasa came close, gripped his arm with slim fingers. "We'll find food," she said. "Somewhere."

"We don't need to worry about water, anyway," he grunted. "It's easy to distill that. And there's—"

"Hai!"

Erech shouted, pointing, his pale eyes ablaze.

"Men—see? There—"

Below them, a little to the left of the drifting ship, a great, jagged crack loomed in the plain. There was movement around it, life—vague figures that were busy in the unchanging silvery twilight of a dying Earth.

"Men?" Murdach whispered. "No."

Nor were they men. As the ship slanted down Mason was able to make out the forms of the strange creatures. Vaguely anthropoid in outline, there was something curiously alien about these people of a dying world.

"Shall we land?" Murdach asked.

MASON nodded. "Might as well. If they show signs of fight, we can get away in a hurry."

The craft grounded with scarcely a jar near the great crack in the ground. Confusion was evident among the creatures. They retreated, in hurried confusion, and then a group of four advanced slowly. Through the transparent walls Mason scrutinized them with interest.

They were perhaps eight feet tall, with a tangle of tentacles that propelled them swiftly forward. Other tentacles swung from the thick, bulging trunk. The head was small, round, and without features—a smooth knob, covered with glistening scales. The bodies were covered with pale, pinkish skin that did not resemble human flesh.

Murdach said, "They are—plants!"

Plant-men! Amazing people of this lost time-sector! Yet evolution seeks to perfect all forms of life, to adapt it perfectly to its environment. In earlier days trees had no need to move from their places, Mason knew, for their food was constantly supplied from the ground itself. With the passing of slow eons perhaps that food had been depleted; limbs and branches had stretched out slowly, gropingly, hungrily. Painfully a tree had uprooted itself. The mutant had given life to others. And now, free of age-old shackles, Mason saw the plant-men, and fought down his unreasoning horror at the sight.

Murdach said, "Listen! I think they're speaking to us—"

"Speaking?"

"With their minds. They've developed telepathy. Don't you feel some sort

of message?"

"I do," Alasa broke in. "They're curious. They want to know who we are."

Mason nodded. "I don't think they're dangerous." He opened the port, stepped out into the thin, icy air. A cold wind chilled him. Among the plant-men a little wave of panic came. They shrank back. Mason lifted his hand, palm outward, in the immemorial gesture of peace.

Within his mind a wordless message stirred. "Who are you? You are not of the Deathless Ones?"

At a loss, Mason answered aloud. "We are friends. We seek food—"

Again the strange fear shook the creatures. They drew back further. One stood his ground, blind glistening head turned toward the man, tentacles dangling limply.

"Food? What sort of food?"

They understood Mason's thoughts, apparently. Conscious that he was on dangerous ground, he said, "Anything you can spare. What you eat—"

"Who are you?"

"We come from the past," Mason answered at a venture. Would they understand that?

"You are not Deathless Ones?"

"No." Mason sensed that the Deathless Ones, whoever they were, were enemies of the plant-men. And his reply seemed to reassure the creatures.

They conferred, and again their spokesman stood forward. "We will give you food, what we can spare. We are the Gorichen." So Mason translated the plant-man's thought message. There was more confidence in the creature's mind now, he sensed.

"You must hurry, however. Soon the Wave will come. . . ."

Puzzled, Mason nodded agreeably. "Bring what food you can spare, then."

"You must come with us. We may not carry food to the surface."

Mason considered, glanced back at the ship. "How far must I go?"

"Not far."

"Well, wait a minute." He went back to the others and explained what had happened. Murdach shook his head.

"I don't like it."

"They seem harmless enough. I'm not afraid of 'em. It's probably the other way around. They'll be glad to

see the last of us. They're in deadly fear of some creatures they call the Deathless Ones, and they think we're related to them somehow."

"Well—" Murdach rubbed his lean jaw. "If you're not back soon, we'll come after you."

WITH a smile for Alasa, Mason leaped out through the port and approached the Gorichen. "I'm ready," he told them. "Let's get started."

Keeping a safe distance from the man, the plant-creatures led him to the edge of the great earth-crack. A sloping ladder led down into the depths. Several of them began to descend it swiftly, and more gingerly Mason followed.

It grew darker. A hundred feet down the ravine narrowed to a silt-covered floor, into which Mason's feet sank. The Gorichen led him toward a round metal disk, ten feet in diameter, that protruded from the ground. One of them fumbled at the disk with its pinkish tentacles. Silently metal slid aside, revealing a dimly hollow beneath.

Another ladder led down. At its bottom Mason found himself in a sloping corridor cut out of rock, leading into hazy distances. The plant-men urged him along this.

"How far?" Mason asked again.

"Soon, now."

But it was fully half an hour later when the Gorichen halted before a gleaming door at the end of the passage. It opened, and beyond it Mason saw a vast and shining cavern, hot with moist warmth. A musky, strong odor blew dankly against his face.

"We feed here," one of the Gorichen told Mason. "See?"

At a little distance was ranged a long row of flat, shallow basins let into the stone floor. Intense heat blazed down upon them. With the basins was a black-scummed, oily liquid. As Mason watched a plant-man marched forward on his tentacles and lowered himself into a tank. He remained there unmoving.

"The rays from the great lamps overhead give us strength," a Gorichen told Mason with its thought-message. "Within the pits we have food, created artificially and dug out of our mines, dissolved in a liquor that aids the transmutation to chlorophyll."

The arrangement was logical enough,

Mason realized. Plant-food, absorbed through the roots—radiation from the huge lights in the cavern's roof, a substitute for solar radiation, waning with the inevitable cooling of the Solar System. But such food was useless for human beings.

Mason said so. One of the Gorichen touched his arm with a soft tentacle-tip.

"It does not matter."

"What?" A chill premonition shook Mason. He glanced around swiftly at the blankly shining heads of the plant-men. "What do you mean?"

"You are to be used in our experiments, that is all."

"Like hell!" Mason snarled—and struck. His fist crashed out, pulping the body of one of the Gorichen. Its flesh was horribly soft and fungoid. Moist, soft stuff clung to Mason's hand. The Gorichen, a gaping hole in its torso, halted and then came forward again, apparently uninjured. And the others pressed toward the man, tentacles waving.

The battle was brief. Mason's muscles were toughened with fury and desperation, but he had no chance against overwhelming numbers. So at last he went down; was bound tightly, still struggling, with flexible metal ropes. Then the plant-men retreated, and Mason saw something that made his throat dry with horror.

A group of Gorichen were carrying a figure into the cavern—the body of Alasa, bound and silent, bronze hair hanging in disheveled ringlets about her pale face. She saw Mason.

"Kent! They attacked us after you left! They killed Erech, I think. They —"

"Are you all right?" Mason asked, trying to regain his breath. "You're not hurt?"

She shook her head. "No. But Murdach escaped in the ship."

The Gorichen waited silently.

"Murdach escaped?" A little flare of hope mounted within Mason. Alasa seemed to read his thought.

"He can't help. We're under the ocean. These demons took me underground just as a great wave came out of the east. . . ."

NOW Mason realized why the plant-men dwelt underground. The

Moon's nearness caused giant tides that swept resistlessly over the surface of the planet. Now they were far beneath the sea—and would be, until the tide retreated.

Mason grimaced. He tugged unavailingly at his bonds. One of the Gorichen came forward. His thought-message was clear.

"We bear you no hatred. You say you are not of the Deathless Ones, our enemies. Yet you are very like them. For ages we have tried to find a way of defeating the Deathless Ones, and never yet have we succeeded. They cannot be captured. We cannot experiment on them. But you—if we find how you are vulnerable, we may use that knowledge on the Deathless Ones. Certain things we already know. Steel is useless. So are poisonous gases. But there are certain combinations of rays. . . ."

The creature fell silent. His tentacles gestured, and the two captives were lifted, borne toward a glass block that towered near by. A door was opened in its side; Mason was thrust into its hollow interior. Cursing, he struggled with his bonds as the plant-men retreated with Alasa. Rolling over on his side, he peered through the transparent walls. And, watching, he went cold with horror.

To the Gorichen the two humans were guinea-pigs, valuable only as material for their experiments. They dragged Alasa to an altar-like block of stone. Vainly she fought.

The tentacles of the monsters reached out, deftly removing the girl's clothing. In a moment she lay utterly nude, chained to the stone block so that she could scarcely move. A Gorichen wheeled a lens into position. From it a pale ray-beam fingered out, enveloping Alasa's ivory body in lambent moon-glow.

She was unconscious, or seemed so. For a second the ray was visible; then it snapped out. Working hurriedly, the plant-men unbound the girl, carried her to Mason's prison, and thrust her within. They remained in little knots outside the glass walls, their blankly glistening heads inclined forward as though they stared attentively at the results of their experiment.

Cursing, Mason struggled to free himself. Useless attempt! The unyielding metal merely chafed and cut his wrists,

and presently he stopped to glance at the girl. She was regaining consciousness.

She moaned, lifted a slim hand to brush bronze hair from her face. Slowly she opened her eyes. In them was a blind dreadful staring that made Mason catch his breath, his throat dry.

The girl dragged herself to her hands and knees. Her gaze moved questingly about the prison. She saw Mason.

Silently she crept forward. An angry flush was mounting in her face and bosom, and the glaring eyes grew wider.

"Alasa!" Mason called. "Alasa!"

No answer. The nude girl crawled toward him—and stopped. She arose.

Her breasts rose and fell more swiftly. A harsh cry came from her lips.

Then suddenly she sprang at him.

Mason was caught unawares. He felt soft flesh pressed against his face, fever-hot, caught a glimpse of Alasa's flashing teeth, bared in a snarl. What madness had the Gorichen's hellish ray worked?

Mason rolled away just in time as Alasa's teeth drove at his throat. Finger-nails raked his face. Then Alasa leaped again, eyes blazing.

"God Almighty!" Mason groaned. Would he have to kill Alasa to escape being murdered? He drove the thought from his mind; he knew that he could never harm the girl even if she were insane. Yet, for her own sake, he must subdue her somehow. And he had little chance of doing that, bound as he was.

"Alasa!" he called again.

The girl did not heed. Her body glistening with perspiration, she flung herself on Mason, fingers clawing, teeth seeking his throat. He tried to roll over, but could not.

A sharp pain lanced through his neck. He felt the warm stickiness of blood trickling across his skin.

Agonizingly the girl's teeth drove deeper. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEATHLESS ONES

DIMLY, through a red haze, Mason realized that the girl's weight no longer bore him down. Two plant-men held her writhing body in their tentacles, dragging her to-

ward the door. A trickle of blood wormed from her lips. In silence she struggled, striving to break free.

The Gorichen pulled her outside. As Mason watched he saw her body suddenly sag limply in unconsciousness. A pang darted through him. Was Alasa—dead?

The same idea had come to the plant-men. Tentacles were waved excitedly. They lowered the girl to the floor, examining her carefully. A movement of Alasa's arm reassured Mason; the girl tried feebly to get to her feet.

The Gorichen dragged her back to Mason's prison. They thrust her within it. Again the door was shut.

Alasa ran to the man.

"Kent! What happened?"

"You—" Mason hesitated. In the girl's eyes he read the knowledge that she remembered nothing of her nightmare attack on him. The madness of the plant-men had passed from her brain. "Nothing much," he finished. "Can you untie me, Alasa?"

She bent forward, fumbled at the metal ropes. Would the Gorichen permit her to free the man?

At last the task was finished. Mason got to his feet, rubbing his legs to restore circulation. He went quickly to the door, kicked it tentatively.

The plant-men outside seemed to watch undisturbed.

Again Mason kicked the glass, but it did not shatter. He crashed his shoulder against it, but only bruised his arm. The cell was empty, and there was nothing he could use as a weapon.

A cry from Alasa made him turn. She was pointing to a corner of the cell, where walls joined ceiling. Greenish-white, a plume of vapor was entering the prison, coiling ominously in the still air.

Fear gripped Mason. He sprang forward, tried to reach the valve. If he could manage to stuff it closed—but it was too high. Baffled, he retreated to the door and renewed his onslaught on it.

But the substance, tougher than steel, would not yield. Mason paused only when he could scarcely see the door through a thickening cloud of greenish mist. Alasa touched his arm.

"Kent? What is happening?"

"I don't know," he said slowly. "They're experimenting on us. What

they expect—well, I just don't know. Maybe it'll kill us. If it does, I hope it's a quick death."

With a soft little cry Alasa moved close to Mason, and he put protecting arms about her. She buried her face on his shoulder, and for a while they stood there, while the green mists thickened—thickened—

There came a time when Mason was completely blinded. Oddly he had no trouble with his breathing. There was a slight exhilaration, due, he thought, to oxygen in the strange gas, but he was not discommoded. Perhaps the vapor—admittedly experimental—would have no effect on human beings.

HE dropped to the floor, cradling the girl in his arms. In that blind emerald emptiness they waited, and Mason soothed and calmed Alasa as best he could. In spite of himself his pulses mounted at the nearness of the girl's warm, satiny body. The weird gas, he knew, was exciting him; yet the madness grew on him. And Alasa, too, felt the intoxicating effect. Her hands crept up, touched Mason's hair. She drew down his head, guiding his lips in the green blindness till they touched her own. Flame of dark passion blazed up within Mason. . . .

Desperately he fought it down. The girl's breathing mingled with his own, hoarse and uneven. His fingers touched the silken smoothness of rounded flesh, and the touch was like fire. Suddenly his muscles were weak as water.

"Alasa!" he whispered. "Alasa!"

In a surge of newfound strength he pressed the girl's form against him, sought her lips. Fantastic visions flashed through his mind. Weird madness of the plant-men's poisoned gas. . . .

Alasa seemed to slide away, to vanish in a green-lit abyss. She was gone. Mason was alone. The clouds whirled about him, and very faintly he heard a distant throbbing, steadily growing louder. With the portion of his brain that remained sane he knew that this was unreal, a drug-born hallucination, as the deep pounding roared louder in his ears and dark shadows moved slowly down the emerald distances. Clearer the shadows grew, and clearer. . . . Bat-winged horrors that mocked and tittered obscene laughter as they raced down on him . . .

and ever the drumming roar grew deeper, louder, crashing like the tocsin of a demon in his ears. . . .

Faster the green mists swirled. They were a whirlwind of chaotic, blinding brilliance. The devils danced a grotesque saraband, screaming a mocking chant.

It swelled to a frightful crescendo of sound and motion that rocked Mason's giddy senses. He felt blackness creeping up and overwhelming him.

And it was with gratitude that he sank down into deepest unconsciousness!

Slowly Mason awoke, with a blinding headache and an acrid, unpleasant taste in his mouth. He opened his eyes, stared up at the transparent roof of his prison. He was still imprisoned in the crystal cage, but the green gas had been pumped out. Alasa's still body lay beside him. Head swimming, Mason tried to revive her. He stripped off his cloak, wrapped it about the girl.

A grating overhead made him look up. The roof of the cage was sliding aside, leaving a gap four feet wide, running the length of the prison. Plant-men were busy with a kind of crane, swinging its burden, an enigmatic metal block, into place so that it could be dropped into the two human's prison. There came an interruption.

The Gorichen sprang into frenzied activity. Mason could not interpret their thoughts, but he sensed sudden, deadly danger. Frantically the plant-men went racing toward the corridor that led into the upper world. A stray thought-fragment flashed into Mason's mind.

"The Deathless Ones! They have broken the gateway—"

In five minutes the cavern was deserted. Now, if ever, was a chance to escape. Mason looked up once more. The smooth sides of the cell were unscalable. But above the gap in the roof hung the metallic block from the crane's arm, too high to be reached—unless—

A rope? Mason wore only the loin-cloth Erech had given him in Al Bekr, and neither that nor the cloak would support his weight. His glance fell on the metal ropes that had bound him, now discarded in a mound on the floor, and Mason knew he had solved the problem. If only they were long enough!

Picking them up, he paused to examine Alasa. Already assured of her safety, it was with relief that he saw the girl's

lashes flutter, and her golden eyes open. She saw Mason.

"Oh, Kent! Help me up!" She clutched his arm, got unsteadily to her feet. "We're not dead, it seems. I thought we were both slain and in the Pit of Abaddon—"

"Maybe you're right about the last," Mason said grimly. He told her what had happened. "If I can loop the rope over that metal block, we can climb out, I think."

"Can you do it?"

HE shook his head doubtfully. "I can try . . ."

But only after repeated attempts did Mason manage to loop the doubled end of the metal cord over the suspended block. Then a careless move undid his work, and for another ten minutes he tried, a fury of apprehension mounting within him, till at last the anxious work was done. The two ends of the rope hung down within the cell. Mason knotted them together.

"I'll go first. Then I'll pull you up—"

The metal cord was slippery, scoring Mason's skin. He twisted his legs about it, fought his way up, while Alasa held the rope steady from below. And at last he reached the roof of the cell, swung on to it, sweating with exertion.

"Hurry!" he told the girl. Distant sounds of conflict made him fear that the cavern would not be isolated for long.

His muscles, weary with exertion and lack of food, cracked and strained as he hauled Alasa painfully to his side. But it was easier thereafter. They slid down to the floor of the cavern, and swiftly made for the passage that led to freedom.

"It's the only way out, apparently," Mason said, glancing around. "Hold on! There's something I want."

He retrieved a bar of silvery metal, longer than his arm, that would make a formidable bludgeon. He tested it with a vicious swing that smashed the cryptic gears of a machine.

"Good! It isn't soft or brittle. This'll help, Alasa!"

The girl responded by picking up a smaller bar for herself. Battle-light glowed in her golden eyes. She hurried at Mason's side, the cloak occasionally flaring to reveal the pale flesh of her

thighs.

But before they reached the passage-mouth a battling horde spewed from it, struggling in insane conflict. Swiftly Mason caught the girl, drew her down out of sight. Crouching, they watched.

The Gorichen were fighting for their lives. And their enemies were—

The Deathless Ones! Icy cold crawled down Mason's back as he saw the invaders, creatures that were unmistakably human beings, yet more alien to him than the grotesque plant-men. For the Gorichen were normal products of evolution, and the Deathless Ones, Mason sensed, were not.

They were the living dead. In their bodies dwelt life undying, forms that had once been tall and stalwart and god-like in their beauty. Even now some remnant of past splendor lingered, made dreadful by the foul corruption that had overtaken the Deathless Ones.

The name itself explained much. They were men who had conquered death—but not disease! Not—corruption!

All the hideous plagues of mankind had burst into foul ripening on the bodies of the Deathless Ones. None was whole. Loathsome gaping wounds and sores showed the flesh and bone beneath. Tatters of granulated flesh hung in ribbons from some. There were unspeakable skull-faces glaring blindly, and there were mutilations from which Mason turned away, sickened.

Man had conquered death—and, too late, had discovered his error.

The Deathless Ones seemingly could not be injured. Scores of the Gorichen would leap upon an enemy, bearing him down by their weight. And presently the pile of struggling figures would fall away, and show that at the bottom the Deathless One had been busy—feeding.

Mason remembered he had seen no plant or animal life on the surface of the planet. Possibly the Gorichen were the only food of the Deathless Ones. . . .

THE struggle swept away from the tunnel-mouth. With a whispered command Mason gripped Alasa's arm, sprang out from concealment. They heard a dreadful skirling cry go up, heard feet thudding in pursuit. A hand closed on Mason's arm; he whirled; struck out blindly with his weapon, felt unclean flesh pulp under the blow. The

grip fell away and was gone.

The two humans fled up the passage, black fear pacing them.

Were there more of the monsters in the tunnel? Mason gripped the metal bar tighter at the thought. The sounds of pursuit grew fainter, but did not die away.

Slowly the couple's speed grew less. Their hearts were throbbing painfully; their throats parched and dry. An increasing tumult from below made them increase their pace. But they could not keep it up. Once more the Deathless Ones gained.

Alasa stumbled, almost fell. Mason dragged her upright, ran on supporting her with his arm about her waist. "We ought to be near the surface now," he told the girl, and she looked up with a quick smile.

"Soon, now, Kent. . . ."

The pursuers came faster. Mason caught sight of a gleam of silvery daylight lancing down from overhead. The door to the outer Earth!

They reached the ladder, climbed it with frantic haste, the clamoring monsters almost within arm's length. In the ravine Mason pointed up.

"The ladder, Alasa. I'll hold 'em back and then come after you."

She hesitated, and then obeyed. Mason's inattention was almost his undoing. A talon-like hand seized his foot, almost overbalancing him. A frightful skull-face rose out of the pit, screaming with wordless, dreadful hunger. Mason sent the metal bar smashing down, sick revulsion clawing at his stomach.

Bone and brain shattered under the blow. Blindly the thing tried to crawl up, though its head was a pulped, gory horror. The mouth of the pit was choked with dozens of the Deathless Ones, greedy for flesh to feed their avid maws, heedless of blows, pushing up and up. . . .

Mason battered them down, till the very weight of the monsters bore them in a tangled heap to fall back into the passage. Then, gripping the bar in one hand, he ran swiftly up the ladder and rejoined Alasa on the surface.

"I've an idea," he said, grinning feebly, swaying on his feet, "Those things can't be very intelligent. The plant-men are, but—"

Mason stooped, pulled up the ladder.

A group of Deathless Ones emerged from the pit, roaring menace. Spying Mason, they tried to climb the walls of the ravine, but failed. Presently a few of them set off to right and left.

"There may be another way out. We'd better scam—depart, I mean," Mason said at Alasa's puzzled look. "Come on."

"But—where?"

The man scanned the dark sky. A wan Sun glowed huge and red. The Moon had vanished. A chill wind blew over a plain of wet, featureless silt.

"I don't know. Away from the coast, anyway. If we can find Murdach and the ship. . . ."

Silently they set out, trudging across the lonely waste, shuddering in the icy wind that rushed bleakly over the surface of a dying planet.

CHAPTER IX

TOWER OF THE MIRAGE

FOR hours the two struggled through the sticky ooze, up the slope of a slowly rising plain. In the thin air their lungs pumped painfully. Twice Mason saw something flying overhead, vague in the distance, but he could not make out its nature. It was apparently winged, and was clearly not the time-ship.

But they found the ship at last, almost by chance. Its silvery surface glowed like a flame in the gray, dull plain. It seemed hours before they reached it.

And it was empty. Murdach and Erech had vanished. There were signs of struggle, and a pool of dried blood on the floor. In the mud outside a confused track led toward the east. Frowning, Mason swung shut the door and turned to the controls.

"I can move the ship, Alasa. Maybe we can find Erech and Murdach. That spoor's pretty clear."

The girl wrapped her cloak more closely about her slender body. "Do so, Kent." She found a flask of water and offered it to Mason before she drank.

Slowly the craft rose, drifted on above the waste, following the track. On the horizon a spire rose, growing taller as they advanced. It was a cyclopean crag—not the work of nature. It was too regular, Mason realized, a great cylindri-

cal shaft that thrust itself from the gray empty plain into the gray sky, flat-topped, desolate and colossal.

"They may be in that," Mason suggested. "See if you can find some weapons, Alasa."

Presently the girl gave him Murdach's egg-shaped projector. "It worked on the metal men," she told him. "Whether it will succeed in killing living beings I do not know."

"Well, it's better than nothing. I still have my club." Mason glanced down at the metal bar.

The surface of the tower was, perhaps, two miles across, and quite flat. There was an odd flickering in the air above it, and once or twice Mason caught a fugitive glimpse of bright color that flashed out from the gray desolation of the tower and was gone. In the exact center was a round, black opening, and toward this Mason lowered the ship slowly.

He landed on the rim—almost losing control of the craft in his surprise. For directly beneath him, springing out of empty nothingness, loomed a great granite boulder! It was twenty feet high, and he was slanting toward it, paralyzed with astonishment and horror. With a grating crash the ship landed.

The shock almost threw him from his feet. The boulder—was gone! He followed the direction of Alasa's astonished gaze, turned, and saw the boulder behind the ship. Apparently they had passed through it as though it were a phantom.

Nor was this all. All around, where he had seen nothing but a flat, metallic surface from the air, was a wilderness of tumbled, riven rock. To all sides towered the great boulders, and overhead a blazing *white* sun glared down.

"Good lord!" Mason gasped. "We haven't moved in time! What's happened?"

"Magic," Alasa said, solving the problem to her own satisfaction. "Do you think Erech and Murdach are here?"

"If they are, they flew in." As Mason spoke he realized his guess was not too far-fetched. He had seen creatures flying in the air—perhaps the very beings that had captured the vanished pair.

"I hope Erech is not dead," the girl murmured. "Shall we search, Kent?"

Nodding, Mason opened the port,

stepped out, followed by the girl. He approached the great rock and tried to touch it. His hand passed through the brown, rugose surface as though it did not exist.

"It's a mirage," Mason said suddenly, with conviction. "An unbelievably perfect one! Three-dimensional! Artificially created, I'm sure. Look at your feet, Alasa."

The girl's slim ankles were hidden, seemingly, in gray, slate-like rock. But she stepped forward without hindrance. Mason moved to her side, felt the smooth surface of the flat tower top beneath him. He got down and felt the cold metal with his hands. Then, smiling a little, he plunged first his hand and then his head into one of the great phantom boulders, and found himself instantly in profound darkness. He heard Alasa cry out.

HE moved back, and there was the white sun pouring down its non-existent, heatless rays, and all around was the tumbled wilderness of jagged rock.

"Your head," the girl said shakily. "It—vanished!"

"Yeah," Mason nodded. "And I've just thought of something. That hole in the roof. We'd better be careful, or we'll both vanish for good. There may be a stairway going down it, though."

Trying to remember the location of the gap, he stepped forward cautiously, gripping the girl's hand. They waded through intangible rocks that sometimes came up to their waist. It was fantastic, incredible science of an alien world.

And suddenly Mason felt a mighty throbbing that grew and pulsed all about him. The wilderness of barren rock trembled and shivered, like a painted curtain rustling in the wind, and abruptly it—changed! Like a motion-picture fading from one scene to another the panorama of rocks that seemed to stretch to the horizon grew vague and disappeared, and in its place grew another scene, a weird, alien landscape that hemmed in the pair as though they had been transported to another world.

All about them now was a tangled forest of luxuriant vegetation, and the bark of the trees, as well as the leaves, the thick masses of vines, even the grass underfoot was an angry brilliant crimson. Nor was that the worst. The things

were alive!

The vines writhed and swung on the trees, and the trees themselves swayed restlessly, their branches twisting in the air. No wind stirred them. They were living beings, and even the long, curiously serpentine red grass at their feet made nauseating little worm-motions.

There was no Sun—just an empty blue sky, incongruously beautiful and peaceful amid the writhing horrors that hemmed them in, the forest that was as immaterial as the phantom rocks had been.

"Wait a minute," Mason said. He took a few steps back, for a curious theory was forming in his mind. And again came the mighty throbbing and the strange crawling and shifting of the red forest, and as he retreated it melted swiftly into the familiar wilderness of jagged rock. Alasa had vanished. Looking over his shoulder, Mason could see the time-ship beside the great boulder. He moved forward again and Alasa sprang into view, her golden eyes wide and frightened.

"Okay," he told her. "Let's hunt for the hole, eh?"

"Here it is, Kent. I almost fell into it." She pointed at the worry tangle of red grass near by. Mason stared. Of course, he could not see down into the gap. The scarlet vegetation hid it. He knelt and, overcoming his repugnance, thrust his face down through the twisting grasses. He was in empty blackness—below the ground level in the world of the red plants, Mason knew.

A curious conviction came to the man that these scenes, the strange mirages on the tower, were not merely created phantoms, but actual reflections of real worlds that exist, or did exist, or will exist in the future. He circled cautiously about the gap.

It was about twenty feet across. His fumbling hands found an incline going down into the darkness, slippery and too steep to walk upon. It went down at an angle of about forty-five degrees, as well as Mason could judge, crawling on his hands and knees and feeling there in the empty darkness.

"Kent," the girl said with quiet urgency. "Listen!"

"Eh? What—"

Then he heard it—a harsh, very loud scratching noise. It came from the

depths of the invisible shaft. It grew louder, and a sudden premonition made Mason seize Alasa's hand and retreat swiftly. It was lucky that he did.

The thing came out of the shaft, and first they saw a bristle of waving antenna, and two huge claws jerking convulsively in empty air. It came rising inexorably out of the ground, and in a moment they saw the whole frightful being.

"An ant!" Mason heard himself whispering. "A winged ant!"

BUT it was a colossus. Twenty-five feet long it towered, mandibles clashing, wings outspread, rustling dryly as they clashed against the wing-cases, crawling up blindly.

The creature moved forward. It was blind, Mason guessed. No eyes were visible, but the antennae apparently took their place. The claws clicked menacingly.

Horror turned Mason cold. As the thing advanced he flung himself back, pulling Alasa with him.

"The ship!" he said unsteadily. "Come!"

The white-faced girl nodded, kept pace with him. At a venture Mason raced in the direction he thought the ship lay. His guess was wrong.

Almost immediately he heard the throbbing and saw the wavering and shifting, and then they were rushing through—nothingness! Empty fog, gray billows of thick stuff that were so turbid he was completely blinded. Thinking with lightning speed, Mason turned at right angles, dragging Alasa, and cut across in a frantic attempt to locate the ship.

He heard a clashing, a dry rustling—the giant ant, hurrying in pursuit. Madness of fear tugged at Mason's brain. It was the quintessence of horror, wading through rocks he could not feel, racing through trees that did not exist. The ant trailed its prey by scent, or by some less familiar sense, and as it was blind the shifting three-dimensional mirages made no difference to it. They had been created, apparently, to confuse the enemies of the ant-monsters.

Mason and Alasa would be sprinting through what seemed to be a field of emeralds, glinting under a hazy sky with a low-hanging moon, when there would

come the shifting and throbbing, and the panorama would fade away like the mirage it was. And in its place would come, perhaps, a vast field of frozen white, with not an object visible and a black, starless sky overhead. Once they were hurrying through a green swirl of water, with seaweed drifting by and curious creatures swimming past them—through them! A thing like a great opaque white ball, pulsating and writhing, drifted at Mason, and he leaped aside, shuddering.

Then they would hear the dry rustling, and it would be bolt, sprint, race with temples throbbing and sweat running into their eyes, till the two would be forced to fling themselves down and rest while they gasped for breath. They went zigzagging and plunging through a weird and fantastic array of alien worlds and scenes. Mason could not help flinching when a great tree or wall of ice would loom in his path, though he knew the thing was an impalpable phantom.

Then, too, there was the ever-present fear that they would plunge off the edge of the tower. What saved them was nearly their doom, for as they went racing through a curiously regular rank of thin columns, like bamboo, that stretched up to a far whiteness that was either the sky or an incredibly lofty roof, they burst suddenly into the world of living vegetation. Mason went rushing through a swaying red tree. The rasping sound of pursuit was loud in his ears—and his feet went from under him.

Letting go of Alasa's hand, he fell heavily on his side, sliding down till his hips were on the polished slide that led down into the interior of the tower and the lair of the ant-monster. He kept on sliding.

Desperately, Mason gave a frantic twist and squirm that nearly broke his back; he felt Alasa's hands pulling him to safety. The girl's white body gleamed through the flaring cloak. Somehow, Mason scrambled to his feet, his breath a flaming agony within his lungs.

The monster was nearly on them. Remembering Murdach's weapon, Mason clawed it out, aimed it. A thin beam sprang at the giant ant. Light crawled weirdly over the frightful head.

And the thing—died! Without a sound it dropped, though its impetus carried it forward till it slid over the brink

of the abyss and vanished from sight. No sound came from below.

TREMBLING a little, Mason replaced the weapon. "Come on, Alasa," he said shakily. "We've got to find the ship. There may be more of those devils around."

But it was not easy to locate the vessel. The two played a weird game of blind-man's-buff there on the top of the tower, hurrying through mirages, some they recognized, others totally unfamiliar. Some were horrible and others pleasant enough.

The worst was hurrying over a black, gelatinous substance that heaved restlessly underfoot, like the hide of some Cyclopean monster. It might have been, for all he knew, Mason thought. The black, heaving skin seemed to stretch for miles around, and sometimes the two were buried to their hips in it.

Again they were hurrying across a field of hard, frozen brown earth, with a phenomenally beautiful night sky overhead, studded with constellations and gleaming planets, entirely unfamiliar. A great comet glowed in its white glory among the stars. Then there was a surface of ice or glass, and looking down Mason could see, far below, vague and indistinct figures that seemed entirely inhuman, as far as he could make out through the cloudy crystalline substance.

They staggered through a world of blazing fire, flinching as heatless tongues of flame licked at them. They reeled across a vast desert of sand that crawled and billowed beneath them, stirring with a monstrous embryonic life.

But at last they found the ship. With heartfelt relief Mason followed Alasa aboard and closed the door, sent the vessel lancing up. The girl sank down in a limp heap, her breasts heaving tumultuously.

At a safe distance above the tower Mason stopped the ship, hovering there, while he pondered. Were Erech and Murdach captive within the huge eidolon? Or—

A cry from Alasa made him turn. She was pointing.

"Look! It's—"

"Erech!" Mason finished excitedly. "And Murdach!"

Crawling across the gray plain, almost at the foot of the tower now, was one of

the giant ants, carrying in its claws two limp figures that were, even at the distance, unmistakably human. His hand closing on the weapon in his pocket, Mason sent the ship flashing down.

But—the thought came—could he use the ray projector on the monster without killing his friends? No, he couldn't risk it.

The huge ant seemed to sense danger. It paused, antenna questing, as the ship dropped toward it. Then, dropping its burdens, it spread its wings and mounted to do battle!

CHAPTER X

THE PEOPLE OF THE PYRAMID

GRIMLY Mason guided the ship forward. The tensile strength of the craft he did not know, but he suspected that under the ant's chitinous armor it was fragile. In this he was wrong.

A blow of the monster's wing crashed against the ship, sent it whirling, hurling Mason and Alasa from their feet. He caught a glimpse of the tower rushing toward him, managed to drag himself upright against the controls. With scarcely a foot to spare the vessel looped around, went driving back toward the winged colossus.

The creature came to meet them. In the last moment before impact Mason's fingers stabbed at the panel, attempting to change the course. But he was too late. With a grinding, frightful impact winged monster and time-ship came together—catastrophically.

Mason was hurled back, his fingers raking blindly over the control keys. He had a flashing vision of the ant's shattered body plummeting to the plain below, and then intense blackness was all around him. Something thudded against his head, and in his last second of consciousness Mason realized what the darkness meant. The ship, unguided, was racing through time!

Only for a moment, it seemed, was Mason out. Groaning with the pain in his throbbing head, he lifted himself to his feet and fumbled blindly in the darkness for the controls. Then, suddenly, he realized that the gloom was not com-

plete. Through the ship's transparent walls he saw a star-bright sky above, and an uneven black wall around, apparently a rampart of trees. The ship lay tilted perilously on its side. He saw a pale blotch in a corner, Alasa's face.

He could not aid her while she lay on the sharply-slanting floor. Mason opened the port, managed to scramble out, half carrying Alasa. Underfoot was a layer of humus, half-rotted vegetation with a dank, musky odor. The air was uncomfortably hot and moist.

Fumbling in the starlight, Mason tried to revive the girl. She sat up eventually, clinging to him, rubbing a bruise on her shoulder.

"That ant—where are we, Kent? Did we find Erech and Murdach?"

"I guess not," Mason told her. "Apparently the time-controls were accidentally moved when we hit the giant ant. We've probably come through time to this sector, and crashed while we were unconscious. It's sheer luck that we didn't have our necks broken. I guess the ground surface is higher here than in the future-time—that may account for it."

"But where are we?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. I don't think we went forward—this thick forest, and the heat, indicates a past era. I hope it isn't the Cretaceous. I'd hate to meet a tyrannosaur."

"What's that?" the girl asked, her eyes wide.

"A—a dragon. The name means thunder lizard. But—"

And then the attack came. Mason had heard no noise in the underbrush. But out of the forest dark figures came charging. There was no warning. Before Mason had a chance to brace himself he went down, a dozen wiry bodies swarming over him—and then fire burst in the back of his head. Red fire that was swallowed up by abysmal blackness. . . .

He awoke in the dimness of what seemed to be a crudely-built hut. Warm sunlight slanted through the doorway; a human shadow—shadow of a guard—darkened the floor. Mason shook his head, groaning. He heard a low, muffled chanting.

And—recognized it! In his archeological work, probing into the far corners of the globe, Mason had acquired a sound knowledge of little-known dialects. He

had heard similar sounds, long ago, floating down a South American river in a hollow log dugout, his arm throbbing and festering with the wound of an arrow.

Had he, by some incredible chance, returned to his own time-sector?

THE doorway darkened. Men filed in, near-naked little men, with brown, muscular bodies. They were grotesquely painted, and feathers nodded and waved in their hair. Chanting, they freed Mason's legs. Leathern thongs, he realized, still bound his wrists.

Hesitatingly Mason spoke, trying to remember that alien dialect of years ago.

"I am—a friend—"

A native struck his mouth. "Silence! The word was oddly accented, but recognizable. "You are to watch, not to speak."

Again the chant rose.

"Hear our prayers, O Thunderer! Hear the prayers of the Curupuri—"

The natives urged him outside the hut. Mason blinked, accustoming his eyes to the strong sunlight. He stared around.

The towering walls of a crater marched on the horizon. Black basalt ramparts hemmed them in. To the east was a jagged gap, apparently a pass. At their feet the ground sloped down to the motionless, sullen waters of a lake.

No wind ruffled its surface. Dark, enigmatic, it filled the crater, save for the narrow strip of land on which the native village stood. The score of flimsy huts were in curious contrast to the stone pyramid that stood on the lake's shore.

Mason was pushed toward it. Its shadow fell on him. It was perhaps thirty feet high, built of huge blocks of stone, without mortar. In one side was a gaping aperture. Into this the white man was conducted.

A short passage, and then a room, half underground—a temple, Mason realized. Amazement lanced through him. At one end of the chamber was a raised dais, on which stood a chair—a throne, gleaming dully in the light of torches. A golden throne, jewel studded!

Its build was suggestive of Incan workmanship. Yet these brown-skinned natives were not Incas. Perhaps Incas had built this pyramid, and had been killed by the invading tribe—the Curupuri, as they called themselves, Mason hazarded.

This was the past, he knew. A time perhaps long before Columbus had reached the Indies, certainly prior to the coming of the Spanish Conquistadores.

On the throne a corpse sat. A mummy, withered and shrunken and dry, in whose eye-sockets glowed two flaming rubies. Golden breast-plates and a girdle of gold hung loosely on the skeletal figure.

Beside the throne stood a native girl, her amber body scarcely hidden by a translucent feathery cape, through which alluring curves were visible. Her sullen eyes brooded on the white man.

On the walls were heads. Smaller than coconuts, shrunken by some secret process that preserved flesh and features, their multitude almost hid the rough stones. Natives' heads, all of them.

The chanting grew louder. A dozen gaudily-painted Curupuri filed into the chamber. Among them was Alasa. For a moment her golden eyes met Mason's. "Kent!" she cried. "They—"

A guard clapped a rough hand over her mouth. Cursing, Mason wrenched at his bonds. His captors held him, silent and impassive.

The Curupuri took the girl up to the dais, clamped golden rings about her ankles. From the throng a dwarfish native stepped to stand beside the girl. His face was hideous with paint. From a bald, shaved head white feathers nodded, set in a jewel-studded headdress. The man lifted his hand, and the noise quieted.

From the Curupuri came a great shout.

"Zol!"

The native girl stepped forward. Mason read hatred in her eyes as she glanced at the dwarfish Zol.

Again came the deep-throated roar.

"Yana! Ho—Yana!"

Zol threw back his head, the white feathers bowing. He cried, "The Thunderer looks with favor upon us."

HE pointed to the withered corpse on the throne.

"For years she has sat there, ruling the Curupuri in death. Since she lived we have found no girl with a skin white enough to be our priestess. So Yana has served—"

He glanced slyly at the priestess beside him.

"But now her toil has ended. From

the skies has fallen a maiden with a skin white as foam. Almost we slew her—but the Thunderer stayed my stroke."

From the Curupuri came a roaring chant.

"Ho! Deller in the Abyss, Dark Thunderer—hear us!"

The girl Yana cried, "Hear our prayers! Drink—eat of our sacrifice!" Her red lips were cruel.

"Lord of the Lake!" thundered the Curupuri. "Look on our sacrifice!"

Then silence, heavy and ominous. Yana said, "The priestess must be unblemished." Her voice was sweetly malicious.

Zol nodded, turned to Alasa. His hands went out, ripping the tattered cloak from her. A gasp went up from the natives.

The girl stood nude. Her bronze hair spilled in a tumbled mass on bare shoulders. Instinctively her hands went up in an attempt to cover herself.

Zol shouted laughter as he gazed at the nude girl, at the sweeping curves of her body, flawless in its beauty. Then the priest tore the feather cloak from Yana and cast it about Alasa's shoulders.

Nausea tore at Mason's throat as he saw the body of the priestess, naked save for a brief loincloth. From neck to ankles she had been tattooed. Red and blue designs circled the mounds of her breasts, fled across her rounded hips. Understanding of the months of agony the girl must have endured made Mason feel suddenly sick.

The shouting died. Zol chanted, "She is unmarried—perfect! Tonight the testing begins. The mark of the Thunderer shall be put upon her."

The mark of the Thunderer? Alasa shuddered, drew the translucent cloak closer. In the eyes of Yana, Mason saw a red blaze of rage. Her lashes drooped, she turned away.

The Curupuri closed about Mason. Vainly struggling, he was forced from the temple, taken back to the hut. There, legs once more bound, he was left alone.

The afternoon dragged on. Occasionally the guard would enter to test the captive's bonds. Though Mason tried to engage in conversation with the man, he met with no success. Perhaps the Curupuri were forbidden to converse with their prisoners.

Just after sunset Mason heard voices outside the hut, and presently Yana, the

priestess, entered. Two natives were at her heels.

One was the guard. He freed Mason's feet, and with the other Curupuri, left the hut. The priestess knelt beside Mason.

In the dimness the disfiguring tattooing was invisible, and Mason could see only the smooth curves of the girl's body, scarcely hidden by thin cloth. She said softly, "The guard is gone. I told him Zol wished him to hunt in the forest. And the other who waits without—is my friend."

Mason stared at her. Fumbling with the Curupuri dialect, he said, "One has need of friends here."

She nodded. "It is true. I—would like to save the white girl?"

"Yes!" Mason said swiftly. "Will you help me?"

"Perhaps."

"Why?" He did not entirely trust this girl in whose eyes murderous rage sprang so easily.

"In your place I should not hesitate. You are strangers, I know that. You are not gods, as some said, else you would not be bound and helpless now. Whence you come I do not care, so long as you leave here swiftly."

"The—the place where we were captured. Is it far from here?"

"NO. You saw the gap in the mountains—the pass? It is not far, just beyond that. You can reach it in a fourth part of a day. And as for why I shall help you—it is because the white girl will take my place! For years a pale-skinned priestess of our tribe has ruled us. When the last one died I took her place. Zol did not like that—for I would not always obey him. Now he sees a chance to depose me and gain a puppet priestess. . . . I would kill this white girl, but it would be sacrilege. I would be tortured . . . but if you escape with her, it will be different."

"Then untie me," Mason said, his voice eager.

The girl bent down, her hair brushing Mason's face. "But you must not fail! For there is another way—" Again the mad rage flared in her eyes. "I have been the priestess of the Thunderer for more than a year. And I have learned much—the words of power that call the Dark Lord from the lake." Her tone was

brooding. "I had it in mind to use those words. Once before it was done, ages ago, and the Dweller rose from the depths. The Curupuri died—all but a few, who fled."

She shrugged, and her knife flashed, slicing through the last thongs that bound Mason. He stretched cramped muscles.

"Tell me," he said curiously, "have you ever seen any white men not of your tribe? Like me?"

"No. Never. I did not think any existed. Our priestesses had golden skin, not as white as yours." She watched Mason speculatively. "You must wait. It will be dark soon. If you leave the hut now you will be killed."

The hard anger was gone from Yana's eyes; they were strangely tender. "You are not like the Curupuri. And—since I became a priestess—I have not known—love. . . ."

Suddenly her arms were about Mason's neck, her breath hot against his cheek as she strained against him. Mad torrents of passion seemed unleashed in the priestess. She whispered softly, "I have not known love. And—"

Mason tried to free himself. The girl drew back, her face hardening. She said, "No? Remember—you have not freed the white girl yet. If I should summon aid—"

Mason grinned wryly. Then Yana was in his arms once more. It was not easy to resist—no! Under the thin cloth of her garment he felt the alluring curves of her body.

Shrugging, Mason bent his head, touched the girl's lips. He did not draw back. The moist inferno of her mouth quickened his pulses. Within the priestess was the hot soul of flame, breath of the searing *Zonda* that blows across the pampas—hungry passion that surged through Mason like a rushing tide.

She shuddered, moaned. A noise came from outside the hut. Instantly Yana pulled away, a finger at her lips.

"Wait. . . ."

She disappeared outside. Mason heard her voice raised in dispute with a deeper one; then the two died slowly in the distance. He crept to the entrance, peered out. No one was visible nearby, though a few Curupuri moved aimlessly about the village in the distance. The sun was already low.

He would not have to wait long.

Two hours later it was dark enough to make the venture. The guard had not returned. He slunk out of his prison. The moon had just risen, and he kept in the shadows of the huts. A heavy club discarded by a dying fire caught his eye, and he confiscated it.

He moved toward the pyramid, a muffled chanting waking ominous apprehensions within him. He caught a glimpse of motion on the summit, and he thought he saw Alasa's bronze hair, though he could not be sure.

Glancing aside at the lake, Mason involuntarily shuddered. What had Yana said? A Thunderer in the depths—a monster-god to whom the Curupuri sacrificed. In this dawn of history, could some strange survival actually exist beneath those sullen waters? Even in his day there had been legends of the South American swamps and jungles. . . .

CHAPTER XI

BLOOD ON THE PYRAMID

MASON halted near the base of the pyramid. On the structure's flat top gleamed a golden throne, and on it was the mummified corpse of the former priestess. In the moonlight Mason saw Zol, the squat priest, standing there, and beside him a group of other natives.

And Alasa was there, wearing the feather robe, in the grip of two natives. The low chant grew louder. Abruptly Zol turned, removed the breast-plates and girdle from the corpse, and lifted the mummy from the throne. He swung the body thrice around his head—sent it arcing down till the black waters of the lake broke in a silvery spray.

The mummy floated briefly; then there was a brief commotion, and the thing was dragged down. It vanished. The chanting swelled to a triumphant roar.

Mason moved forward cautiously, the cudgel in his hand, as Zol lifted the feather cape from Alasa's bare shoulders. She stood nude in the moonlight, a glorious statue of loveliness. Vainly she struggled as she was dragged to the throne, seated within it, her arms and legs bound securely. Zol beckoned, and a

Curupuri came forward, a deep bowl in his hands.

Others advanced, bearing a long pole to which a native was bound. A great shout thundered out.

From the shadows men came—the Curupuri tribe, thronging about the base of the pyramid, watching the drama being enacted on its summit. Mason drew back, his fingers whitening on the club.

Zol's hand moved swiftly. A bubbling scream of agony came from the captive. Blood fountained from his throat. Deftly the priest thrust the bowl beneath the gaping wound, filled the vessel.

The men on the pyramid were silent—waiting. Zol dipped his hands into the bowl, lifted them dripping red. He smeared the blood on Alasa's nude body, till from neck to ankles her slender form gleamed crimson. He lifted the knife again, lowered it gently. Its point touched Alasa's bare stomach.

The girl cried out sharply. This, Mason guessed, was the beginning of the tattooing ceremony. For months thereafter Alasa would endure the frightful torture of sharp knives, of agonizing pain of pigments rubbed into the raw wounds till her body was covered, like the priestess', with fantastic designs.

Again the knife came down. Again Alasa cried out—a soft, frightened cry that sent red madness surging into Mason's brain.

He lifted the cudgel as he sprang forward. A line of natives barred him from the pyramid, but he broke through the Curupuri with a murderous sweep of his weapon that sent a man sprawling, head smashed into pulp. Shouting, Mason sprinted forward.

Behind him he heard a deep-throated roar. He ignored it, racing up the rough stones of the pyramid that offered easy foothold. On the summit men were milling about, staring down, their weapons drawn. Before they could organize he was among them.

He saw a snarling face, pale in the moonlight, looming up before him—and swung the club. The man went down, screaming.

"Take him!" Zol shouted. "Take him—alive!"

Then suddenly the priest was racing forward, a spear in his hand, arm drawn back for the throw. Mason sent the cudgel spinning at his opponent.

His aim was true. The missile crashed into Zol's face, obliterating the brown features in a smear of blood. Red spurted from the man's flattened nose. Screaming, he went down.

But already a dozen Curupuri were on Mason; grimly he slugged and kicked and clawed. A bare foot kicked viciously at his face. He twisted his head away in time to avoid the blow.

BUT Mason went down at last, fighting desperately. He felt his hands being drawn behind him, saw Alasa straining forward on the throne, her body darkly crimson. She cried, "Kent, are you hurt? Did they—"

"I'm okay," he said—and Zol came forward, his ruined face bloody and hideous. He glared down at the white man.

"Soon you will die." His whisper was fury-soft. "But not slowly—no!"

He turned to the lake, lifted the sacrificial knife.

"Dweller in the Abyss," he chanted. "The priestess is prepared. Soon she will serve you."

Mason strained to escape from the arms that held him. Useless!

The Curupuri below the pyramid roared applause at the priest.

Then silence. And cutting through it a thin, high scream that made the short hairs prickle on Mason's neck. There was defiance in that scream—desperate rage, and horror, and something above and beyond all these. The priest hesitated, looked down. His jaw dropped.

Mason turned his head. On the beach, knee-deep in the black waters, was Yana the priestess, nude, a golden statue in the moonlight. Her black hair streamed in the wind. She lifted her arms; her red lips parted. From them came again that dreadful cry—

Alien. Summoning!

Summoning—*what?*

The priest shrielled, "Slay her! Slay her!"

The others streamed down from the pyramid's summit, racing toward Yana, save for two who still held Mason motionless. The priestess cried again that strange call.

In Zol's face Mason read something that made him look out across the lake. A few ripples troubled the black surface. That was all.

No. There was more. Something was moving toward the shore, a dark and tremendous bulk that glided through the waters with unhurried smoothness. Something that could never exist in a sane world. . . .

And now Mason remembered Yana's words: "I have learned much—the words of power that call the Thunderer from the lake. Once before it was done, ages ago, and the Dweller rose from the depths. . . ."

The god of the Curupuri had answered the summoning of his priestess. Through the dark inky waters the thing glided, and a black, shining bulk arose in the moonlight, a flat and serpentine head and a long, undulating column of neck. . . .

Zol's face was a Gorgon mask of horror abysmal. The natives were almost at the lake's shore—and they shrank back. Yana screamed her weird call—and the cry turned into a shriek as the monster was upon her.

The giant head swooped, lifted with the girl's body dangling from immense jaws. Cold, reptilian eyes surveyed the village. As the girl vanished into the thing's maw the creature lumbered up onto the beach.

Desperately Mason tried to rationalize his fear. Some prehistoric survival—an aquatic reptile that had dwelt for ages in this secret crater, untouched by the changes of evolution. It was possible, he knew. Always there had been tales of such monsters filtering through the jungles, gigantic beasts that dwelt in the Patagonian swamps and the hidden fastnesses of the Andes. Yet he could not control the cold horror that crept over him at sight of the thing that was emerging from the lake.

Its body was over fifty feet long, torpedo-shaped, with great flippers that propelled it slowly forward. The snake-like head and neck writhed, curved. All over its shining, reticulated body grew algae; shells clung to the armored hide. It came plunging up into the village, and the Curupuri went stampeding in a frenzied panic that made them easy prey for their god.

The two natives holding Mason went with the rest. Only Zol stood his ground, glaring around, bruised lips working silently. He saw Mason. He sprang forward, knife upraised.

THIS time Mason was ready. Grinning unpleasantly, he dived at the priest, tackled him viciously. Zol stabbed down with his knife, sending a white-hot streak of agony along Mason's ribs.

The white man clutched his enemy's wrist, held it motionless. Yelling rage, Zol bent his head, tried to sink his teeth in Mason's throat.

The screams of the fleeing Curupuri came up from below. And a cry—closer, nearer! Alasa!

"Kent! The devil-god—it's coming here—"

The sweating, bloody face of Zol was a gargoyle mask; the man's breath was foul in Mason's nostrils as the priest tried to reach his enemy's throat with his teeth. Beyond, a gargantuan shadow in the moonlight, Mason saw the head of the monster—coming closer!

Mason let go of the other's knife-wrist. Zol was not expecting that move. Before he could recover, the white man had gripped the priest by neck and crotch, hurled him up in mid-air. Mason's muscles cracked under the strain. He spun about swiftly, staggering.

The priest tried to stab down, missed. He had no other chance.

Out of the night came rushing the devil-god, silent and menacing. The huge head was not twelve feet from the pyramid's summit when Mason let go of his captive.

Sent Zol hurtling straight for the monster!

His aim was true. The jaws dipped slightly, and gripped the priest. One agonized shriek Zol gave, and then his bones and flesh were ground into pulp between remorseless fangs.

Mason waited to see no more. There was no time to free the girl; he leaped to the throne, picked up her bound, nude form, and slung it over his shoulder, hoping that Alasa would suffer no injury by such treatment. But it was that or death, for already the monster's head was snaking out as Mason leaped down the pyramid's side, keeping his balance with difficulty. He was trying to reach the passage that led into the structure, and he succeeded just as the giant reptile's jaws clicked closer than Mason cared to guess.

But they were safe, for the monster could not reach them in the narrow tunnel. Mason retreated further into the

darkness, warily trying to pierce the gloom. Other Curupuri might have retreated here. Perhaps, though, their panic fear had driven all thought but instant flight from their minds.

Later Mason realized that this was indeed the case. But at present he was busy freeing Alasa, comforting her hysterical tears as well as he could. There was no sound from outside; either matters had quieted down, or it was difficult to hear within the pyramid. Mason drew Alasa close, and she, too frightened and exhausted to resist, relaxed in the man's arms, and, presently, slept. Mason did not arouse her. Though his position was cramped, he endured it, fearing that any movement on his part would waken the girl.

When an hour or more had passed, he judged it time to move.

"Alasa," he whispered. She stirred.

"Kent? What's wrong?"

"Nothing," he told her. "But we'd better be moving."

The girl arose and followed Mason to the portal. Peering out into the moonlit night, they could see nothing of the Curupuri, though a distant commotion in the jungle hinted of the monster's activity. Mason was quick to act. Seizing Alasa's hand, he hurried around the pyramid's base and slipped through the village, keeping carefully in the shadows. Once the girl paused to pick up a discarded length of cloth and wrap it about her nude body. Both of them, shivering in the cool night air, would have been glad to search for warmer clothing, but they dared not spare the time.

THEY headed for the pass in the crater's walls. "You can reach it in the fourth part of a day," the priestess had said. If anything, she had overestimated the distance. Presently Alasa and Mason reached the gap, having seen nothing of either the Curupuri or the monster.

Below them lay a broad stretch of moonlit jungle, slanting down to a distant horizon. Far, far beyond that horizon, Mason guessed, lay the Atlantic Ocean, the Ocean Sea of a pre-Columbian Europe. For a moment a queer thought was strong in his mind; he would like to visit that lost, strange world, dim in the forgotten past. How odd it would be to see and speak with the legendary figures of history!

He saw the time-ship. Half a mile away, it lay in a little clearing in the forest, the moonrays reflecting from it in a blaze of cold brilliance. Mason wished he had brought a weapon. There might be jaguars—perhaps even the prehistoric giant sloth lumbered through this teeming jungle.

Night-prowlers were abroad, but they did not menace the two humans. Once some beast stalked them for a while; they could hear it rustling in the underbrush. But it gave up presently and disappeared. And once a jewel-bright macaw fluttered sleepily across their path, screaming its harsh cry.

But they came to the ship without hindrance. The Curupuri had apparently feared to enter it, for Mason found nothing amiss within the craft. He felt oddly relieved when he had closed the port, looking Alasa and himself within.

"I hope nothing was wrecked when we crashed," he told the girl. "It wouldn't be—pleasant."

Mason set to work examining the instruments. For more than an hour he puzzled over the intricate dials and gauges. Something he had learned from Greddar Klon, and more from Murdach. So, after a time, he felt that it might be possible to return to the future-world from which they had come.

"This dial," he said slowly, "indicates our time-rate, I think. Each time we stop, a permanent record of that halt is marked on the dial—those red spots, see? This one, at zero, is your own world, I imagine, where the ship was built. This dot, further up, is right under the needle. That's where we are now. And the third dot is where we left Murdach and Erech. If I can set the controls to that time-sector—"

It was another half-hour before Mason was satisfied. He tested the mechanism, lifted the ship fifty feet into the air. The atomic power worked smoothly enough. With a grim nod at Alasa, Mason threw the time-switch.

Blackness. A second, an hour, or an eon—a brief eternity in which there was no consciousness of time. Then light came again.

The tower of the giant ants sprang into visibility nearby. They had reached their destination. The amazingly accurate controls of the craft had brought them back to the lost world of the fu-

ture. But something was wrong.

From the tower's summit a horde of giant winged ants were pouring down, racing toward the ship. On the ground below lay the crushed form of another monster. But of Murdach and Erech there was no trace!

Instantly Mason guessed the reason. They had come too far—a few moments, or a few hours. No longer, certainly. His familiarity with the instruments helped him now. He made a quick adjustment and again moved the time-control.

Blackness—and light. The ship had apparently not moved. Only the Sun was in a different position in the sky, and the horde of ants had gone. Looking down, for a brief incredible moment Mason saw a replica of the time-ship, with two figures in it, rushing forward, colliding in mid-air with a huge ant. And as he watched—the ship vanished!

It was gone—back, Mason knew, to the pre-Columbian South American jungle. The ant, crushed, was falling toward the ground—toward two figures, missing them by a few feet. Erech and Murdach!

They waved tiny hands upwards, gesticulating. Mason sent the ship down, grounded it, flung open the port. Toward the craft raced the two men, eyes wide with hope they had long abandoned.

Erech pushed Murdach aboard, sprang after him. "By El-lil!" he swore. "You come in time, Ma-zhon! Let's get out of here, quick!"

Murdach was fumbling with the controls. The time-ship lifted, lanced across the desolate plain.

At last the four were reunited. Now—now, Mason thought triumphantly, they could seek Greddar Klon. Seek the Master—and slay him!

CHAPTER XII

STRANGE QUEST

THE ship hung above the leaden sea, safe from attack, while the four talked, and Murdach and Mason planned. Murdach's tattered leather uniform was hanging in rags. His hawk-face was gaunt and tired; his red hair dark with grime. But Erech seemed unchanged. His pale eyes

watched coldly above the beak of a nose; the thin lips were grim as ever.

"What I can't understand," Mason observed, "is how I got from Arabia—Al Bekr—to South America, a continent on the other side of the globe. I was moving in time, not in space."

"Globe?" murmured Alasa, puzzled. "Surely the Earth is flat, surrounded by an abyss?"

Murdach said, "You traveled in space, too. In a million years, or more or less, the world travels with the Sun, naturally, along its orbit. But the gravitational drag keeps the ship bound to Earth, which is lucky or we might find ourselves in space, light-years from any Solar System. The ship's bound—but not too tightly. The Earth revolves; the time-ship lags; and so you found yourself once in Al Bekr, once in—what did you say?—South America, and once here. But all three places are near the equator."

He turned to pages of calculations. "I've located Greddar Klön, I think. But nothing's certain. We cannot stay here, though, or we'll starve to death soon enough. Shall we—?" He read the answer in the others' eyes. Without speaking he sent the ship into time.

The light failed, and grew again. They hung above a craggy mountain range, gigantic, towering to the sky. The Sun was warmer, closer and larger. Earth was green again, lacking the dead, leaden grimness of the ultimate future.

"This is before my own time, and after yours, Mason," Murdach said. "About 2150."

"2150 A.D.? That was Nirvor's time-sector," Mason said, remembering the words of the silver priestess. He went on, as a sudden thought came to him, "Hadn't we better find weapons first? In my time I can dig up a few—machine-guns, bombs—and you probably have better ones in your time, Murdach."

The other looked at him oddly, a curious expression in his eyes. "My time—I do not wish to return to it. Not yet, at least. As for weapons, the Master will not be expecting us. And we can perhaps find arms on our way. The needle points to the east, and we must go there. We'll watch as we travel."

Mason was not satisfied, but said no more. He scanned the barren mountains and plains, the teeming jungles, the lakes

and broad sea over which they fled. Once he saw a gleaming globe on a mountain-top, and pointed it out to Murdach. The other brought the ship down.

A transparent globe, miles in diameter, hanging in empty air. Within it, as they hovered, Mason could see unfamiliar-looking machines, rows upon rows of long cylinders of glass. Within the cylinders were human beings, men and women, dead or asleep.

Murdach landed the ship, and they tried to find some way of entering the giant globe, but in vain. There were no openings, and the transparent substance was steel-hard.

"We have a legend of this," Murdach said. "In the days of beast rule, ages ago, when experimenters sought to create human beings out of animals. Mankind foresaw some danger, a temporary waning of the solar rays, I think. They built huge spheres and sealed themselves within, throwing themselves into suspended animation for years. A few scientists tried to adapt themselves to the changing radiation, and spent their time making beasts into men, having some thought of creating an empire of their own to defeat the sleepers when they awakened. But they failed."

"We can't get weapons here," Mason grunted. "That's sure, anyway."

"There was some weapon those last scientists perfected," Murdach mused. "It was lost, forgotten. Only its power was remembered. No shield could bar it. If we could find that weapon, use it against Greddar Klön—" His eyes were alight.

"You need such magic to battle the Master," said Erech. "My scimitar would fail. I know that!"

The ship rose, drifted on. A jungle slipped beneath. Far away, steadily growing nearer, was a city—and Mason caught his breath at its heartbreaking beauty. Not Rome nor Babylon nor Capri had ever had the delicate, poignant splendor of this strange metropolis, hidden in the jungle, crumbling and cracked with age at closer view, but still a matchless jewel of architecture.

"A rose-red city half as old as time," Mason quoted softly, half to himself.

The ship drove down. There was furtive movement in the jungle metropolis—not human movement. Animals scurried from sight. A leopard loped swiftly

away. Birds flew startled.

"Greddar Klon is close," Murdach whispered. "My instruments show that."

The ship landed in a marble street. Hesitating, Mason opened the port, stepped out. Nothing happened. The still, humid air was utterly silent.

Far away a beast cried, lonely and strangely poignant.

In the distance Mason saw a human figure. It came forward slowly, with a shambling, dragging gait. A man—an old man.

An Oriental, Mason guessed, noting the distinctive shape of the eyes, the facial contours, the hue of the skin. The oldster's face was withered, shrunken and dry as a walnut. Sparse white hair patched the skull. The thin lips moved endlessly, whispering. Filmed eyes dwelt unseeingly on Mason and the others.

BUT the man halted, and a new look came into his face. He spoke louder, in a language Mason thought he recognized. It was Chinese, but oddly changed, with a different stress and accent. Yet if Chinese had persisted for so many centuries, there was no reason why it should not exist in 2150 A. D. Two hundred years would make little difference.

The Chinese said, "The Sleepers have awakened, then?"

Guessing at his meaning, Mason replied carefully, "We are not Sleepers. We come from another time—another age."

The man closed his eyes; tears trickled from the wrinkled lids. "I thought I had been forgiven. Ah, we have been punished indeed."

"Punished?"

"When the Sleepers went to their globes of refuge, we refused to join them. We thought to build a kingdom of beast-men. We reared cities for them, took possession of those already existing. We raised up the beasts . . . but that was long ago. Only a few are left now. They warred one upon another; slew and were slain . . . so now I, Li Keng, live alone in Corinoor, since Nirvor went across the desert with her leopards. . . ."

Murdach had caught the familiar names. "Nirvor?" he broke in. "Ask him more of this, Mason! Is she here? What does he say?"

"I have met Nirvor," Mason said in

Chinese. "She is alive, I think. You are her friend?"

Li Keng did not reply. Into his eyes crept a dull glaze. His lips twitched, writhed. He mumbled wordlessly. Suddenly he broke into a maniacal cackle of laughter.

A chill shook Mason. The oldster was mad!

Li Keng sobered. He ran skeletal fingers through his thin hair. "I am alone," he murmured. "Have the Sleepers forgiven? Did they send you?"

"We are from another time," Mason said, striving to pierce the mists about the dulled brain.

"The Sleepers? Have they forgiven?" But Li Keng had lost interest. His low, insane laughter rang out again.

Apparently the man knew nothing of Nirvor or Greddar Klon, though Mason could not be sure. He touched the Chinese's shoulder.

"Is there food here? We are hungry."

"Eh? There is fruit in the forest, and good water."

"Ask him of the weapon!" Murdach whispered. "Ask him!"

Mason obeyed. Li Keng peered through rheumy eyes.

"Ah, yes. The Invincible Power. But it is forbidden . . . forbidden."

He turned to go. Mason stepped forward, gripped the oldster's arm gently. The other tried feebly to disengage it.

"We mean no harm," Mason explained. "But we need your help. This Invincible Power—"

"You are from the Sleepers? They have forgiven?"

Mason hesitated. Then he said slowly, emphatically, "The Sleepers sent us to you. They have forgiven."

Would the ruse work? Would the crazed brain respond?

Li Keng stared, his lips working nervously. A thin hand plucked at his scant hair.

"This is true? They will let me enter a globe of refuge?"

"Yes. But you betrayed them before. They demand that you prove your faith."

The Chinese shook his head. "They—they—"

"You must give them the Invincible Weapon as proof that you will not betray them again."

Li Keng did not answer for a long mo-

ment. Then he nodded. "Yes. You shall have it. Come."

He lifted a hand as Mason beckoned to the others. "They may not come."

"Why not?" The other's voice was suspicious.

"There are only two suits of protective armor. The radium rays would kill you unless these are worn. We must go down into the radioactive caverns beneath Corinoor. . . ." Li Keng paused, and a dull glaze crept over his eyes. Swiftly Mason translated.

"I don't dare cross him now. Might set him off his head entirely. You three stay with the ship—guard it till I get back with the weapon."

"But Kent!" Alasa's face was worried. "There may be danger—"

"Not from Li Keng, at least," Mason smiled. "I can look out for myself. Even if I were sure there's danger, I'd have to go. Until we get the weapon, we're unarmed."

"Let him go," Murdach said quietly. Erech said nothing, but his brown hand tightened on his scimitar-hilt.

"LET us start, Li Keng," Mason told the old Chinese, and followed the other along the deserted marble street. Presently Li Keng turned into a half-ruined building, passing between sagging gates of bronze, curiously carved. He halted in the portal.

"You must wait," he said. "Only worshippers of Selene and the condemned may enter here. I must tell the goddess my plans."

Before Mason could reply he slipped through an inner door and was gone. Whispering an oath, Mason took a stride forward—and halted. He peered through the narrow crack left by the half-closed panel.

He saw a huge, dim chamber, cryptic with gloom, and towering at the further end a monstrous female statue. Li Keng was moving across the floor, and as Mason watched he dropped to hands and knees, supplicating himself before the idol.

Well, there was nothing to fear from a goddess of stone or metal. Grinning crookedly, Mason drew back, and caught his breath as he heard a tumult from outside. An angry shout—

With a leap Mason reached the bronze doors. He peered out. His stomach

moved sickeningly at the sight before him.

Dozens of malformed, half-human figures filled the marble street. They milled uncertainly about the time-ship, and in their midst were two bound, prostrate figures—Alasa and Murdach. Coming toward Mason was—Greddar Klon!

The Master, moving forward with quick, hurried steps, pointed jaw set, eyes cold and deadly. Behind him came more of the strange creatures, beings more bestial than human, Mason sensed. He remembered the weird science that had changed animals to men, and guessed that the malformed, hairy, brute-faced monsters were products of that eerie experiment. Simultaneously Mason knew what he must do.

He saw Erech, scimitar red and lifted, running forward. The Sumerian roared a battle-cry. He sprang at the Master, set himself for a stroke that, for all its force, could not penetrate the shielding atomic mesh.

Mason charged out through the bronze gates. He caught a glimpse of Greddar Klon whirling, involuntarily shrinking under the Sumerian's blow, lifting a metal tube in a tiny hand.

Mason's shoulder hit Erech, sent the giant driving aside. He flung himself on the Sumerian, striving to wrench the scimitar free, reading stark amazement in the other's pale eyes. Amazement—and anger, red rage that surged through Erech's veins and gave him strength enough to throw Mason down with ease. But the beast-men by now had surrounded the two.

Mason felt rough hands seize him. He made no resistance. Quietly he stood up, let the beast-men drag him toward Greddar Klon. Erech was still battling furiously, but without his scimitar he was handicapped. He went down at last, still struggling. His captors trussed him up with thongs.

The Master's cold eyes were probing. The shrill voice said, "Is Erech, then, your enemy, Mason?"

"Yes." The archeologist was playing for time. He had acted on impulse, knowing instinctively the best plan. But now he needed a chance to scrutinize his cards, to see which ones to play. He said, "Can we talk alone, Greddar Klon?" He nodded toward Erech.

For a long moment the other did not

reply. Then he called a command, and two of the beast-men pulled Mason toward a nearby doorway. The Master followed.

Inside the building, in a fungus-grown, ill-smelling little room, Greddar Klon sat cross-legged on the floor. He signalled for the beast-men to release their captive.

"Thanks," Mason grunted. "There's a lot to explain. I didn't know if I'd ever find you."

"And now that you have—what?"

"Well—I still want to hold you to your bargain."

The other shrugged narrow shoulders. "Return you to your own time-sector?"

"Something more, now," Mason said quietly. "After you left Al Bekr, Ereeh asked me to help him release Alasa and Murdach. I did. Murdach explained your plans, that you intended to conquer a civilization and rule. My own civilization—isn't that so?"

"I, too, shall be frank," Greddar Klon conceded. "That is true."

"THEY wanted to find and kill you. Murdach built another time-ship. I helped him. I pretended to feel as they did. It wasn't difficult—for I wanted to find you, for reasons of my own. Back in Al Bekr I'd have been satisfied if you had returned me to my own time. But now, knowing what you intend, I want something more. I want a part in your kingdom, Greddar Klon!"

"I had thought of offering you that," the Master murmured. "But I did not need your aid."

"Are you sure? My world is unfamiliar to you. You will not know where to strike—what countries and cities to attack, what shipping and trade routes to block. I know my own world, and with my help, the information I can give you, you'll be able to subdue your enemies more swiftly and more easily."

"And you want?"

"Rule. Rule of a nation, under you, of course. I want power—"

The Master stood up. "I see. You are very clever, Kent Mason—but whether you are speaking the truth I do not know, as yet. You may be in earnest, and you may be trying to trick me. Until I have reached a decision, therefore, you will remain a prisoner—but safe."

He gestured. The beast-men seized Ma-

son, pulled him out into the street. He made no resistance. He had planted a seed in Greddar Klon's mind, and now there was nothing to do but play a waiting game. He had not dared to bargain for the lives of Alasa and the others—that would have made the Master instantly suspicious.

His captors led him into another rose-marble building, and down to vaults far below. In a bare stone room he was locked. A torch set in the wall gave light, but how long it would last Mason did not know.

The shaggy, hulking forms of the beast-men lumbered out of sight. Mason was left alone, captive, his mind haunted with fears for his friends.

CHAPTER XIII

COURT OF THE BEASTS

AFTER a time Mason rose and examined his prison. The walls, though cracked and lichened, were sturdy enough. The barred door was of metal, and too strong to force. Nor were ceiling or floor any more promising. Mason shivered in the chill air, wishing he had something warmer than a loincloth.

But the torch gave heat as well as light, until it expired. In the darkness it was somehow harder to judge time, though Mason guessed it was nightfall when at last one of the beast-men came with food. He poked it through the bars, a mess of fruits, specked and half-rotten, which Mason found it difficult to swallow. The beast-man brought a new torch, however.

It could not have been more than half an hour later that Mason saw a glimmer of light approaching. He went to the door, peering between the bars at a stooped, withered figure approaching. He made out a shriveled, Oriental face—Li Keng!

The Chinese slowly unbarred the door. He beckoned Mason out.

"We must be silent," he mumbled in his cracked voice. "Nirvor has returned, and has brought an evil one with her. They seek the Invincible Power, but they do not know its hiding-place. Nor do they know I hold the secret. Come!"

He shuffled along the corridor, his skinny hand gripping a torch. Mason kept pace with him.

"The others?" he asked softly. "My friends? Where are they?"

Li Keng did not hear. His wheezing voice went on, "Nirvor has brought the beast-men from the forest into Corinoor. But she shall not have the weapon. You shall take it to the Sleepers as proof of my faith."

Mason felt a pang of pity for the old man. They turned into another underground passage, and another, a veritable labyrinth, until Mason was hopelessly lost. Once he saw a white shadow slipping away in the distance, and remembered Valesta, Nirvor's leopard. But the beast did not reappear, if it had been Valesta.

They stopped before a metal door. Li Keng fumbled in a recess in the wall, brought out two clumsy lead-sheathed suits. "We must wear these. The radium rays—"

Mason donned the garment. It had a transparent hood which covered his head completely. The Chinese, ungainly in the armor, pushed open the door.

They stood on the brink of a cliff that sloped down into a gray fog of distance. A narrow path ran perilously slanting down, and along this Li Keng started, keeping his balance without difficulty. Mason followed, with an inward tremor as he glanced aside into the dim gulf.

For perhaps a hundred yards they skirted the cliff, and then rounded a shoulder. Mason paused, blinked blinded eyes. A flame of roaring brilliance blazed up from the gulf before him, and all through his body a curious tingling raced. The deadly radium radiations, he knew.

The path ran out on a spur of rock, narrow and dangerous, that hung over the abyss. Below it was a cauldron of fire, like the pit of a volcano. But more potent than liquid lava was the fire that burned here, having within the frightful power of radium!

A sound came from behind them. Mason turned. He cried out, his voice drowned in the roar of the inferno. Stalking along the path toward him was Valesta, the white leopard.

Behind her—Nirvor, and at her heels the black leopard, Bokya. And dozens of the beast-men, fangs gleaming redly in

the flame-light, eyes glowing.

From Li Keng came a cry so piercing that Mason heard it even above the thunder of the radium pit. The Chinese flung out an arm, gesturing Nirvor back.

The priestess laughed. Her silver hair floated unbound about her shoulders, half bared by her diaphanous black robe. She took a step forward.

Li Keng turned. He raced out on the spur. On its end he went on hands and knees, and then sprang erect, gripping a metal box in his gloved hands. Before the watchers could move Li Keng, gripping the box, had leaped out into the abyss!

A shriek came from Nirvor. Mason had a glimpse of her face, twisted into a despairing Gorgon mask—and then the white leopard was upon him. He went down under the onslaught. Only the width of the path here, at the base of the spur, saved him from toppling over. As it was, he hung for a moment on the brink, the leopard's weight bearing him down, the snarling beast-mask above his face.

Rough hands gripped him. The leopard leaped lightly away. Beast-men drew Mason back onto the ledge, lifted him to his feet. He was held motionless, facing the priestess.

She made a quick gesture, and Mason was forced back along the path. No use to resist, he knew. It would mean destruction, and even though he killed a few of his captors, he would inevitably be thrust into the gulf. So Mason let the beast-men prod him back to the metal door, where they stripped the armor from him.

Nirvor's face was white. "I have dared much," she whispered. "Men do not live long above the radium pit. A little more, and I would have died . . . horribly!" She shuddered, ran white hands along her slender body.

THE white leopard muzzled her leg, was thrust aside by the black one. The priestess said, "I thought Li Keng had the secret, and so I watched him. But he has destroyed the Invincible Power, and himself with it. He is beyond my reach. But you—you are not, Kent Mason!" A red blaze was in her jet eyes.

"We hold court tonight," she murmured. "Your three friends will die then. And you will die with them."

She gestured. The beast-man thrust Mason forward. Silently he let himself be taken back along the interminable corridors, back to his cell. But Nirvor did not pause there. Up and up they went, till at last they emerged in the streets of Corinoor.

"In here," the priestess commanded.

Mason recognized the building—the same one into which Li Keng had led him earlier that day. In the moonlight its ruin was not evident; it seemed a veritable palace of enchantment, a symphony in marble.

Through the bronze gates they went, through the inner door. The huge chamber was no longer dim. It was ablaze with torches, swarming with the beast-men. At the further end was a gigantic statue of a nude female form, moon-crowned.

Nirvor made a gesture toward the image. "It is Selene," she said. "Goddess of Corinoor—Corinoor that is soon to rise again in its former splendor!"

The priestess paused before a panel in the wall. It opened at her touch, and she pointed within.

"Go there, Kent Mason. Quickly!"

He obeyed, finding himself in a dusky, luxuriously furnished little room, ornate with tapestries and cushions. A small image of Selene stood in an alcove in the wall. The air was curiously dark, heavily scented with perfumes that rose headily to Mason's brain. He turned.

Nirvor stood alone before the closed door. Her black eyes dwelt on him cryptically.

"I have told you you must die," she said.

"I heard you," Mason grunted. "So what?"

"I—I have hated you. I have reason to do so. My kingdom, my goddess, my city of Corinoor—these I worship. For them I would destroy you utterly. Yet—" The jet eyes were strange, strange! "Yet you remember something I told you long ago in Al Bekr. I am woman. . . ."

She made a hopeless gesture. "Now my heart is sick within me. For I know you should die, I know you hate me—"

The priestess dropped to the floor, her silver hair unbound veiling her face. "Ohé, ohé!" she sobbed. In all my life I have known no man like you. There were the scientists, like Li Keng—and

the barbarians of Al Bekr—and Greddar Klön. And the beast-men. I am woman, Kent Mason! I long for something I have never known . . . and that is love."

Mason did not reply. The honey-musk perfume was very strong. He felt oddly detached from his body, slightly drunk. He did not move when Nirvor arose and came toward him. She drew him down into the cushions.

Cool hands were against his cheeks; a flame-hot mouth avid on his own. And the strange eyes were close. . . .

Once more Mason read a message in them—a—message of alienage! He drew back.

"You fear my eyes," Nirvor whispered. "But you do not fear my body. . . ."

She stood up, her gaze hidden by long lashes. She fumbled at the fastenings of her black robe, let it fall in a laey heap about her ankles. Mason caught his breath at sight of the priestess' voluptuous body. His throat was suddenly dry and parched.

Nirvor sank down again, her eyes closed. Her hands touched Mason's face, guided his lips to her own.

Something clicked in Mason's mind, like a blind springing up abruptly, letting light into a foul and darkened room. Immediately the dulling soporific spell of the perfumed incense was gone. For now Mason *knew*—

His stomach seemed to move sickeningly. He thrust the girl away. Her eyes glared into his.

Hoarsely Mason whispered, "I should have guessed the truth! What you and Li Keng and Murdach told me—"

Nirvor's lips were a scarlet wound in the pallor of her face. She shrieked, "You dare look at me like that! You dare—!"

"No. You don't like me to look at you now that I know. The scientists and their experiments—changing beasts into human beings—God!" Mason was shuddering as he remembered the passion the girl's body had aroused in him. He went on softly, unsteadily, "You are the outcome of such an experiment, Nirvor! You're not human. *You were a beast!*"

The priestess sprang up, bosom heaving, fingers clawed. "Aye! And what of that? They made me into a woman—"

Mason's face betrayed his horror. He whispered scarcely audibly, "What were you?"

Nirvor was silent for a moment. Then she said, "Bokya and Valesta—"

"The leopards?"

"They are my sisters!"

Her face contorted, Nirvor sprang to the door. She flung it open. From the great chamber beyond welled a deep-throated roar.

She cried a command. Beast-men poured into the room, seized Mason. Too sick with repugnance to speak, he fought desperately until weight of numbers bore him down, the foul odor of the beast-men strong in his nostrils.

Nirvor stood above him, a statue of living evil. Then she said, "You are proud of your humanity, Kent Mason? You may have cause to regret it. For now you come to the Court of the Beasts!"

THE huge chamber was filled with surging multitudes of the beast-men. On a low dais before the statue of Selene, Mason saw, were three bound figures. Alasa, Murdach, and Erech. Mason was dragged to the dais, flung down upon it. Two beast-men held him motionless.

Nirvor stood beside him, a slim hand lifted. She cried something in the guttural language of the monsters. They roared a response.

"The verdict is death," the priestess said mockingly to Mason. "First—the girl. Prepare her, my people!"

She nodded, and a beast-man lifted the slim figure of Alasa, carried her into the midst of the horde. Shaggy, bestial figures closed around her. A scream broke from the girl.

Mason had a glimpse of rough hands loosening the cords, ripping the cloak roughly from Alasa. The girl was thrust upright, stood for a second staring wildly around, her bronze hair falling about her white shoulders. She cried out, held out imploring hands toward Mason. She took a few steps toward him—

The pack closed in, brutal hands mauling the girl's body. Cursing, Mason struggled with his captors. They held him motionless; their binding arms tightened, shutting off his breath. Gasping and sweating, Mason forced himself to relax.

Nirvor screamed a command. The beast-men drew back slowly. One of them threw Alasa's body over his shoulder and loped toward the dais. The priestess

pointed up.

A pulley hung from the roof, thongs dangling from it. The beast-man, in obedience to Nirvor's words, bound Alasa's wrists tightly to the hanging ropes and then turned to a windlass near by. He turned it. Slowly Alasa was lifted till she swung by her hands, her hair falling like a veil over her face and breasts. Up and up, till her feet no longer touched the floor. . . .

At last Nirvor nodded. The beast-man drew back. Alasa hung perhaps ten feet above their heads, a vision of tortured loveliness.

The priestess snarled at Mason, "She is human. But soon it will be difficult to be sure of that!"

Nirvor touched a lever. A grinding of machinery came from above. Staring up, Mason saw an arm of the image of Selene swing slowly down. God! Was Alasa to be crushed to death between the metal hands of the idol?

No, that could not be it, or both arms would be moving. The left arm of Selene halted about three feet from Alasa's dangling form. From the hand billowed a jet of white cloud—and the girl screamed in utter agony!

Steam! Live, boiling steam, hot enough to sear flesh from bone! Again Mason fought with his captors—and again they subdued him.

The hissing from above stopped. The steam had been on for only moments, but already Alasa's white body was flushed to a deep pink.

The image's arm swung back, lifted. The other arm descended slowly, with a ponderous creaking of gears. No steam issued from the metal palm, but Alasa's form writhed in pain, while a blast of chill air blew over Mason.

THE torture of boiling steam, alternated with currents of icy, frigid air! This would be no quick death for Alasa, but a lingering hell of torment unendurable. She was sobbing softly, low moans of pain that made Mason feel sick and giddy.

"Nirvor!" he said urgently. "For God's sake, stop it! I'll do anything—"

"You are too late," the priestess whispered. In her jet eyes was torture-lust; on her face was stamped the cruelty of the beast. Her heritage, the leopard stigmata, was ruling now.

"Too late, Kent Mason! She shall die, and the others—but more quickly than you. Not for many moons shall you perish, and before you do you shall know the deepest pits of pain. . . ."

Erech snarled a lurid oath. "Mazhon! Cannot you get free? These cursed ropes are too strong for me!"

MURDACH'S thin face was a pale, grimy mask of hopelessness. "They've destroyed the time-ship," he called. "Greddar Klon wrecked it."

Nirvor touched the lever again; once more the arm of the goddess began its slow descent. But before the live steam could jet forth there came an interruption. Into the chamber, through the open bronze doors, drifted a shimmering, transparent ovoid.

The time-ship of the Master! And within it—Greddar Klon!

CHAPTER XIV

VENGEANCE IN CORINOOR

THE ovoid dropped beside the dais. Greddar Klon flung open the port, stood there, his cold eyes roving over the scene. He said harshly, "You take strange liberties, Nirvor."

As though sensing peril, black leopard and white slunk on to the dais, ranging themselves on either side of the priestess.

Nirvor said, "These captives are of no value."

"I am the judge of that! This man—" Greddar Klon pointed at Mason—"I told you to leave alone."

"I caught him with Li Keng, in the hiding place of the Invincible Power—"

"You found it?" Mason read eagerness in the Master's eyes. And so he spoke quickly, breaking in before Nirvor could answer.

"She lost it for you, Greddar Klon! She burst in on us with her leopards and beast-men, and Li Keng destroyed himself and the treasure rather than let it fall into Nirvor's hands."

"Is this true?" The Master glanced at the priestess.

"True—aye! As far as it goes. But ask him why he was seeking the Invin-

cible Power. Ask him that!"

"I was seeking it for you," Mason said smoothly. "Li Keng set me free from my cell, told me he would not give the secret to you or Nirvor. I convinced him that I could guard the Power safely. I planned to secure it and give it to you, Greddar Klon, so you could know what my aid is worth."

"He lies!" the priestess spat. "He lies!"

"Set him free," Greddar Klon said. No one moved for a while. Then the Master's hand lifted, in it a metal tube. A beam of light flicked out, touched one of the beast-men that held Mason. The creature bellowed in agony, clawed at its chest—and dropped. It was dead.

The other beast-man waited for no more; he fled into the throng. The two leopards moved forward, guarding Nirvor with their bodies, green eyes baleful.

Mason swiftly turned to the windlass. He lowered Alasa to the dais, freed her wrists. Then he unbound Erech and Murdach.

Nirvor watched him, her lips a thin white line. Abruptly she turned on Greddar Klon, snarled, "I say this man lies! And I say he shall die—and the others."

The Master said in English, a language Mason did not realize he knew, "Come with me into the ship. Leave the others. Nirvor means to attack—and the beast-men will follow her."

Mason hesitated. His gaze went to the time-ship. Their own vessel had been destroyed, Murdach had said. Well—how could this situation be best turned to advantage?

Suddenly Mason knew. It would be a long chance, a desperate one, but the only one possible. With a sudden movement he sprang down from the dais and was at Greddar Klon's side.

His motion caused chaos. The priestess thrust out her arms, screamed a command. The leopards shot forward, snarling. The beast-men surged closer, and Greddar Klon hastily leaped into the ship. Mason followed him. The port slammed shut.

Through the transparent wall Mason could see Erech thrust Alasa behind him, guarding the girl with his body. Murdach was not in sight. Mason looked around.

He blessed the hours he had spent mastering the time-ship's controls. This vessel was identical in construction.

Greddar Klon was at the controls. He touched a button. The ship lifted, hung a dozen feet above the floor, out of reach of the beast-men.

Mason saw the lever he had been searching for. He sidled close to it. Briefly he felt an impulse to depend on his muscles to overcome Greddar Klon, but he knew that the Master's atomic mesh armor was impregnable. No, it must be this way—or failure.

Mason pulled the lever.

THERE was a sudden tension in the air within the ship, a gentle breeze that brushed Mason's face. Greddar Klon turned. For the first time Mason saw emotion on that tiny, mask-like face. Bewilderment, apprehension, rage twisted the slitted mouth. The dwarf took a step forward.

And paused, gasping.

The air pressure was changing.

Mason had adjusted the atmospheric controls within the vessel, and now compressed air was pumping into the ship at dangerous speed. He had considered exhausting the air, creating a vacuum, but he knew that increased pressure would be far more harmful to Greddar Klon. And to himself, also! Already an intolerable weight was pressing in his eyes and ears; he found it almost impossible to breathe. The atmospheric pressure bore down on his chest, expelling air with a rush. It was incredibly difficult to draw another breath.

Greddar Klon's tiny mouth was wide as he gasped for air. He clutched at his belt, brought up the ray-tube. A searing yellow beam darted out at Mason. He twisted aside.

The ray swung toward him. Blood pumped painfully in his temples, and he felt blinding agony as the pressure began to collapse his capillaries and veins. The face of the Master seemed oddly distorted as Mason's eyeballs were crushed out of shape.

The ray seared his shoulder. Greddar Klon staggered forward. And then what Mason had been waiting for happened.

The huge cranium of Greddar Klon—burst!

Burst and spattered and hung in tat-

ters like a smashed egg, the great brain, scarcely protected by a boneless membrane, crushed by the tremendous atmospheric pressure. The dwarfed body tottered and fell. With every movement agony, Mason managed to lift an arm, turn off the air pump. He reversed it, felt a breath of relief, was once more able to see.

Although Mason knew that sudden decrease of pressure could cause caisson disease—the "bends"—he nevertheless sent the air pumping out as swiftly as he dared. Peering down through the transparent floor of the vessel, he saw the beast-men staring up, saw Nirvor near the dais, the leopards beside her. On the dais, unharmed, were Alasa, Murdach, and Erech.

Mason drove the ship down. Taking a chance, he swung open the door, and for a second felt sick and dizzy with the atmospheric change. But already beast-men were plunging toward him.

He whirled, scooped up the ray-tube from where it had fallen from Greddar Klon's fingers. Murdach and the others ran forward. Beast-men cut them off.

Mason burned them down with the heat-ray. A heavy weight landed on his back; he went down, the tube flying from his hand. Iron fingers dug into his neck.

Mason reached up and back, felt fury flesh under his hands. He bent forward suddenly, and the beast-man, taken by surprise, went hurtling down. His back hit the marble floor with a sickening crack. He lay still.

Mason looked around. Erech and Alasa were beside him, the girl's nude body still flushed with the steam-torture. Murdach was running toward them, gripping the ray-tube Mason had lost.

The silver priestess stood on the edge of the dais, shrieking rage. Murdach turned, saw her.

He lifted the heat-ray. From the tube a yellow beam flashed out.

And Nirvor, the beast-woman, priestess of Selene in Corinoor, stood frozen for a brief second, and then dropped down silently and lay dead upon the marble.

The black leopard screamed, a cry that turned Mason a little sick, for he knew the relationship between Nirvor and the leopard. The beast charged straight for Murdach.

He killed it with the heat-ray.

Then he turned and came running toward the ship, scrambling with the others through the open port, slamming it shut, lifting the vessel into the air as a white fury raved and snarled against the transparent walls—the leopard Valesta. The beast-men surged in in a mad charge that was insane with rage. Half-involuntarily Mason touched the controls, sent the ship into time. The fantastic scene outside was hidden by a curtain of darkness.

The black veil lifted. They hung once more in the temple of Selene—but it was empty now. The bronze gates were ajar, and through them a pale, chill radiance crept wanly. Nor were there torches burning in the temple.

IT was dark—and cold, cold!

Age had dropped down upon it.

"We are in the future," Murdach whispered, with a glance at the dials. "A jump of ten years—"

That hell of battle that had raged a moment ago was, in reality, ten years in the past, Mason knew. Silently he brought the ship down. At his feet was the mangled body of Greddar Klön, and he put this outside the ship, without looking at the ruined head and face.

"We cannot stay here long," Murdach said. "The solar radiation has waned. I think life will not exist long on the Earth, save in the globes of refuge. It will be a hundred years and more before the Sun regains its former brightness and the Sleepers awaken. But let us see what ten years has done to Corinoor."

"Is it safe?" Alasa whispered.

"Safe enough," Murdach told her. He led the way out of the ship.

Gloom shadowed the great temple. The jungle had encroached with weeds and fungi and grasses; one of the arms of the statue of Selene had fallen. It was utterly silent.

Alasa came into the circle of Mason's arm. She was shivering.

Murdach said, "One moment. I have something to tell you."

Mason turned. Murdach was standing beside the port of the ship, a dozen feet away. He held the heat-ray in his hand.

His red hair looked black in the shadow. "Don't come any nearer," he

went on. "I do not wish to kill you. I prefer to leave you here, alive."

Unbelievably Mason took a step forward. Murdach's hand steadied. The ray-tube was aimed at his middle.

"Stop where you are!" the other said warningly. "I mean it!"

"Murdach!" Alasa gasped. "What are you doing?"

"Doing? I'm doing what Greddar Klön planned. You never knew why I didn't wish to return to my own time. I'm an outlaw there, a hunted criminal. I tried to overthrow the rulers, and escaped only by flight across the desert, where the time trap caught me. Oh, you've aided me, the three of you—aided me in overcoming Greddar Klön. But now that he's dead, it will be possible for me to do as he intended—conquer a time-sector and rule it!"

"You dog!" Erech roared, pale eyes blazing. "You foul traitor!"

"Say what you like—but come no nearer, or you'll die. The Master's plan shall be carried through as he intended, with this difference—I'll take his place. As for you three, I shall be merciful. I'll leave you here. Perhaps you will live for a time. Perhaps the decreased solar radiation will kill you soon."

Mason felt Alasa's slim, nude body shrink against his. His throat felt dry and tight. To fail now, through Murdach's betrayal, after their struggle! The idea was insupportable.

Mason glanced at Erech, caught a look of understanding in the Sumerian's eye. They would attack at the same time. Murdach would certainly kill one of them, but perhaps the other—

Murdach realized their intention. His jaw tightened. He lifted the ray-tube as Mason's muscles tensed.

And then—out from the shadows charged the impossible! A white, roaring thunderbolt that crashed down on Murdach and sent the man toppling back, struggling vainly against the creature. Instantly Mason knew.

Valesta, the white leopard! For ten years she had lurked in the temple, watching and waiting for the man who had slain the silver priestess. And now, after a decade, he had returned to the fangs and claws of vengeance.

The heat ray blazed out. Flesh ribbed under tearing talons. From Murdach came a shrill, agonized cry

that screamed up and up unendurably, and ended suddenly in a choking, wordless sound that was sheer horror.

Then it was over. Man and leopard lay still and silent—

Unmoving—dead!

MASON felt a queer sense of unreality as he closed the port of the time-ship after he followed the others aboard. He glanced out at the vast, gloomy temple of Selene, sagging into dark ruin. There was an overwhelming awe upon him as he thought of the countless lives that had existed in dead Corinnoor, the incredible multitude of people that would dwell upon Earth until the last man gasped out his breath in the chill twilight of a heatless, lightless planet.

He shuddered involuntarily. Alasa moved close, her golden eyes tender. Mason, glancing down, felt his depression leave him.

"Alasa," he said softly, "What now?"

"We can return—" The girl's voice was hesitant.

"Return—bah!" Erech grunted. "I am tired of Al Bekr, Ma-zhon. Also I am tired of my world. This world of yours, now—I should like to see it. And I should like to be with you. But—" He hesitated, an odd look in the pale eyes. "But I serve you, Alasa. If you wish me to go back to Al Bekr—why, I shall keep faith. But, by El-lil, Ma-zhon is a man to cleave to!"

"I think you are right," the girl said.

"But what does Mason think of this?"

For answer Mason took a step forward, gripped the Sumerian's brown hands. "We have fought well together," he said, "and we would have died together. All that I have is yours, Erech. If you come with me, I do not think you'll regret it."

"And I?" Alasa broke in. Mason turned.

"You will go back to Al Bekr, I suppose," he said, a dull ache in his throat at the thought of losing the girl. "I know how to work the time-ship. I can —"

"Oh, Kent—you fool!" Alasa murmured. "We too have fought together and would have died together. My people are safe in Al Bekr now. Nothing draws me back there. But—would you let me join you and Erech?"

For answer Mason took Alasa into his arms. "Let you? It's the only thing I want. But I didn't dare ask—"

The girl gave a little chuckle as she leaned her bronze curls against Mason's shoulder. "I would not have let you escape me, Kent. Never fear that!"

The Sumerian gave a deep-throated laugh. "Come, Ma-zhon! Let us start. I am anxious to see this world of yours."

"Okay," Mason smiled. "And if you don't like it—well, we still have the time-ship. Perhaps. . ."

He didn't finish. He touched the instrument panel, and the veil of blackness dropped down.

And Alasa kissed him.

THE END



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SURVIVAL AND PEANUTS

Dear Sir:

In Arthur J. Burks' novel, "Survival," reference was made to "what George Washington Carver did with the humble peanut." Will you explain what it was?—E. B., Chicago, Ill.

Carver's work is a miracle of synthetic chemistry. From the humble peanut, the lowly goober, he has made nearly three hundred different substances, from cheese to axle grease, from pickles to dandruff remover. In his laboratory he has served a complete meal, from soup to nuts of synthetic dishes made from the peanut. By his efforts, it has become one of the country's leading crops, with by-products ranging through milk, and ink, coffee and shampoo, butter and face powder, soap and breakfast food, and flour, lard, starch, and rubbing oil for infantile paralysis.

Nor has Carver's scientific thaumaturgy stopped at the peanut. From sweet potatoes he has produced library paste and vinegar, shoe blacking and candy, and more than a hundred other substances. He has made dyes from onions and dandelions, paints from cattle dung, and marble from wood shavings. Beans, clay, and tomato vines have also gone into his test tubes and emerged transformed from that magic crucible.

To realize the full range of Carver's accomplishments is to see that Mr. Burks has taken no liberty with facts in the achievements he ascribes to the occupants of "Sanctuary." By giving them abundant coal, he has put the staff

of life into their hands, because carbon enables other atoms to combine in groups from which all kinds of substances are formed. Oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen, alone or combined, can produce little but with carbon added their combinations are greatly increased and may result in gasoline and oil, bread meat, and other foodstuffs, and raiment.

In other respects the career of George Washington Carver is like that of the first occupants of Sanctuary. Born of slave parents in 1864, he began his great work at Tuskegee Institute with equipment gathered from junkpiles. And like Mr. Burks' epic characters, he has taken the good he has accomplished as his only reward and has never applied for a patent on any of his discoveries.

Of such stuff are heroes made, in real life AND REAL FICTION. And upon such men will our future depend if ever we are faced with the problem of—survival.

VERMIN OF SPACE

Dear Sir:

In my reading I run across many unexplained references to the asteroids. Could you give me more detailed information about them?—R. P. Newton, N. J.

The asteroids or planetoids, are a swarm of more than 1200 miniature worlds independently circling the Sun in the 340 million mile space-gap between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Their origin has not been satisfactorily determined but it is generally believed that they are remnants of solar material, left over when the major planets were formed and kept from uniting by the great gravitational influence of Jupiter. If all were united in a single planet its volume would be less than that of the moon.

They range in diameter from nearly five hundred miles to the size of baseballs, and the largest were discovered almost in the order of their magnitude. First was Ceres, in 1801, with a diameter of 477 miles. The next six years added Pallas, Juno and Vesta with respective diameters of 304, 120, and 239 miles. The last mentioned is the brightest of all, and is sometimes visible to the unaided eye when at its closest approach to earth. By 1890, 300 smaller bodies had been charted, and since then the use of the photographic plate as an asteroid detector has quadrupled that number.

Of little practical value—with one notable exception—to astronomers, the asteroids have been called "the vermin of space"; yet they are emphatic evidence of the law and order of the universe. Because of the gravitational attractions of the giant planets, Jupiter and Saturn, their orbital paths are constantly being changed; moreover, with inclinations from the plane of the ecliptic of as high as 43° , they are continually crossing and recrossing. Yet in this crowded confusion, there are no collisions; each body is held in its path by universal gravitational attraction.

A few of the asteroids are important because of their close orbital approach to the earth. Eros which cuts inside the orbit of Mars, passes within 13,800,000 miles of the Earth. This smallest distance that can separate the two bodies depends on their being simultaneously at the point of minimum separation of their respective orbits at their oppositions. Since Eros approaches six times closer to the Earth than does the sun, its distance can be measured with a precision that is greater in the same proportion, because of its increased parallax, or apparent shift in position as seen from two points. By direct triangulation the distance from the Earth to the Sun in miles can then be determined with three times the exactness of former methods.

A better result may yet be secured from the asteroid called Reinmuth's Object. Found by Reinmuth in 1932, it passed within 7,000,000 miles of the Earth but was out of sight before preparations could be made for the combined observations necessary to determine its distance. Precise prediction of

its return could not be made but, even if it is found again, its faintness will be a disadvantage in measuring the distance. Its failure to show an appreciable disc indicates a diameter of less than ten miles.

Thus Eros may have to be depended upon for determining solar distances. It is believed to be elliptical in form, from 20 to 25 miles long and 8 to 10 miles wide, and rolls over and over as it swings through space, with varying degrees of brightness. Its surface area is about equal to the State of New York or Pennsylvania. So weak is its gravitational pull that a 150 pound man would weigh but four ounces on its surface. He could gather up an armful of the smaller asteroids and with them jump off into space.

WATER WITCH

Dear Sir:

Is it necessary to become an expert geologist to successfully explore for oil, gold, and such? I have heard that there are other ways.—A. G. F., Ogden, Utah.

Science has developed a number of new methods of exploring for mineral deposits. Most spectacular of these is the Eötvös balance, the geophysicists' substitute for the "water witch." It is an instrument which measures the rate of change in gravitational force between a plummet or "bob" and the center of the earth, assumed to be concentrated at its center. If there is heavy material between the bob and the center of the earth, the effect will be great; if light material the effect will be less. The instrument is so delicate that, after balancing, there is an appreciable deflection when quite light material is interposed in the vicinity, while heavy material causes a still greater deflection. By means of such a balance, the whole area can be explored and lines of uniform difference in gravitational force can be plotted on a map. It has been used to discover metallic substances and in detecting and delimiting oil fields. Though it savors of necromancy, it is scientific.

Another method, employed in the oil fields of Persia, consists of exploding dynamite underground and listening to

the sound reflections of rocks in the vicinity. The presence of metallic substance underground can also be detected by instruments which register change in electrical potentials along metallic ones. There is some doubt about the efficiency of the methods in all cases, and their best results are still obtained where the geological structure is already known; but even where it is not, they have been successful many times.

AGE OF THE EARTH

Dear Sir:

I know that the age of the earth has been discovered by studying radioactive substances, but would like to know more about how this has been done. Can you give me a complete explanation?—L. D., Benton Harbor, Mich.

The age of the earth can only be **ESTIMATED** on the basis of the rate of transmutation of radioactive substances. It must further be understood that it is only the length of time since the earth became solid that can thus be calculated—in short, the age of the older or Archaean rocks. Our limited space does not permit a complete account of all such calculations but it is hoped that the following will explain their common basis.

All matter, of course, is composed of atoms. Different kinds of matter differ only in the number and arrangement of the electrons and protons. Some atoms are unstable, especially the heavy ones. Uranium, at the top of the scale, has a core of 238 hydrogen nuclei or protons along with 146 inner electrons, and 92 outer electrons. In these crowded atoms occur explosions which throw off an electron and a proton, thereby changing the original chemical character and resulting in a different element. Radium, for example, is indistinguishable from lead after it has flung away five such electrical charges of each kind. In all cases the process is very slow and centuries may elapse between successive explosions of neighboring atoms but we will see that it produces measurable effects.

Complex radioactive atoms are known to break down but there is no

knowledge of their being built up. Lead can be born, but uranium and thorium and related elements of high atomic complexity seem only to die. Uranium may give rise to protoactinium, which produces actinium which produces lead. Or uranium may give rise to radium, which by giving off helium, also produces lead. Similarly thorium may produce lead. Before going any farther, we must recognize that while the leads produced respectively from actinium, radium, and thorium are similar in their chemical reactions, they differ slightly in the internal structure of their atoms. They are "isotopes" of lead, of which there are a number of others besides ordinary lead.

Now if the isotope of lead is found in a rock along with uranium, we conclude that the lead has been produced by the disintegration of the uranium. Similarly for lead and thorium. Since these rates of transmutation are known experimentally it remains only to calculate how long it would take to produce the proportion of lead that the mineral shows. Thus we determine how much time has elapsed since the rocks were first laid down with the original radioactive element.

Or let us return to the breaking down process in which uranium and thorium, at one stage, produce helium. Since this rate of disassociation is also known, we need only to determine the percentage of helium in fergusonite, an uranium metal or thorianite to calculate the time that has passed since these minerals were formed.

The rates of atomic break downs vary, but as an illustration of their magnitude, it requires sixteen million years for a gramme of uranium or thorium to produce one cubic centimeter of helium at pressure of 760 mm. and 0° C. The final figure we arrive at for the age of the earth is necessarily uncertain, but most calculations based on the transmutation of radioactive substances give a figure between 1,200,000,000 and 2,000,000,000 years, with the higher estimate generally favored by authorities. It is interesting to note that this agrees closely with calculations based on other types of data.

Are the readers interested in other methods of determining the age of the earth?

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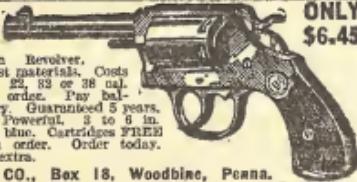
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HOW SHORT IS SHORT?

Dear Sir:

What is the explanation for the statement that a body in motion is shorter than a body at rest?—R. B., Washington, D. C.

All matter, as we know, is composed of electrical particles. That the particles keep a certain average spacing is the result of the electrical forces they exert upon one another. But when electricity is in motion it constitutes an electric current and new magnetic forces are introduced between the particles. Their average spacing must change to restore the balance and the extension of the matter they compose is altered.

These forces arising from the motion of electric charges naturally are of different intensity in the directions along and across the line of motion. Let us assume a metal rod moving at a high rate of speed and pointing transverse to its line of motion. Turn it through a right angle, and the rod contracts. This contraction, known as the FitzGerald contraction, is exceedingly small under ordinary circumstances. It depends not upon the material of the moving object but solely upon its speed. At 19 miles a second, the Earth's approximate orbital speed, it amounts to only one part in 200,000,000, or $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in the diameter of the Earth. But at exceedingly high rates of speed, the FitzGerald contraction is something to be reckoned with.

Suppose you are on a planet moving at 161,000 miles a second. At this speed the contraction is one half. Your arms have been spread wide apart, but now you swing your right arm in front of you. It contracts to one half the length of your left arm! You want proof? Measure them both in these positions

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with a yard-stick. Your left arm is thirty inches. Your right is thirty **HALF** inches, for the yard-stick also contracted when it was turned. Why can't you see these changes? Because your eye, whose retina is similarly effected by the contraction, exaggerates distances in that direction in a proportionate degree. But if the phenomenon always carries its own compensation, is it of any importance? Let us see.

Consider that one of the spiral nebulae is known to be moving at 1100 miles a second. We will leave out the possibility of higher nebular speeds, for at this rate the contraction is large enough to be appreciable. True, it will be compensated in all measurements taken on a planet in this nebula. But not in inferences from those observations! Not when the surrounding objects in space are allocated their respective positions. Since all yard-sticks on this planet contract when they measure distances in a certain direction, **ALL** distances will be reckoned too great in that direction from the planet out into space.

NOW consider that this nebula may **NOT** be moving at 1100 miles a second. That great velocity may belong to the galaxy of which the Earth is a member! All we **KNOW** is that the Earth and this nebula are **RECEDING FROM EACH OTHER** at this speed. To which does the relative velocity really belong? And which has formed a distorted conception of the universe?

We have now reached the most interesting point, where we must leave Newtonian physics behind and consider certain concepts of relativity. But the discussion has gone far beyond the original question, and we do not feel justified in continuing unless our readers assure us they find the subject interesting.

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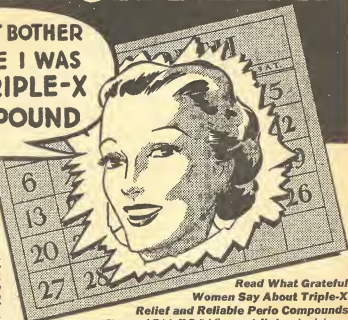
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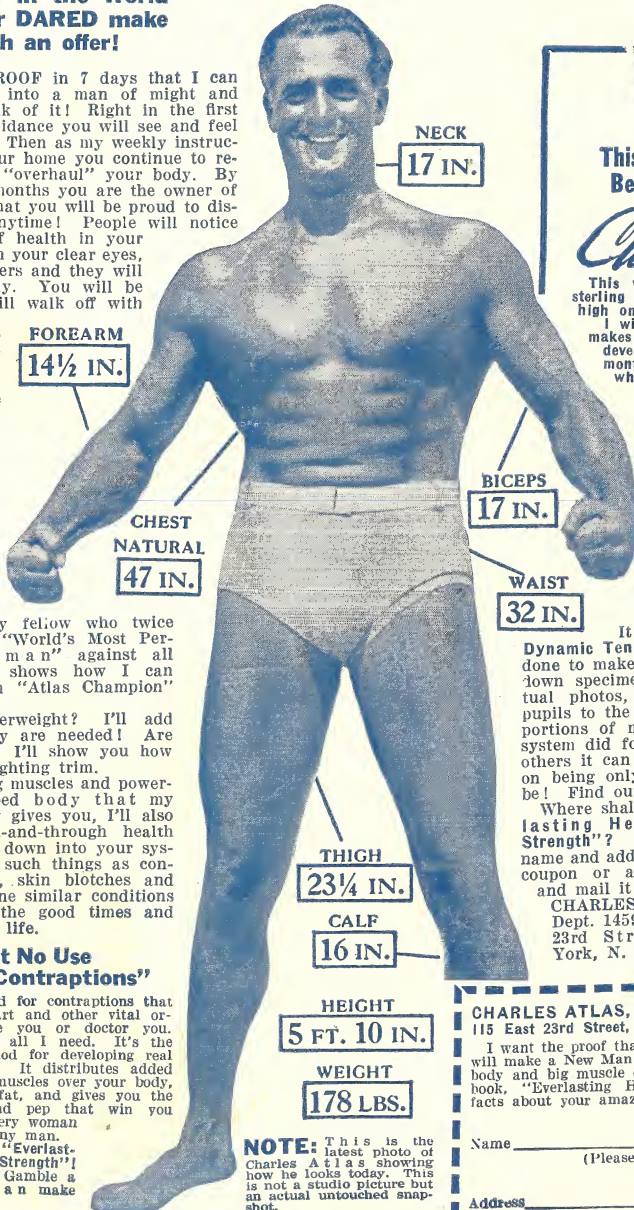
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